

## Food Safety for Fresh Fruits and Vegetables

Fresh fruits and vegetables are important foods and part of a healthy diet. Canada's Food Guide recommends eating 4 to 10 servings of fruits and vegetables each day, depending on your age. Eating a variety of fruits and vegetables helps lower the risk of many chronic diseases, including some types of cancer.

Fresh fruits and vegetables are being linked more often to food-borne illness. They can become contaminated in various ways, including by irrigation waters, soil, fertilizer, wild animals or birds, unsanitary processing methods, and even the consumer.

### What can I do to make fresh fruits and vegetables safe to eat?

There are several steps that you can take to prevent illness, and make fresh fruits and vegetables safe to eat.

- First, always wash your hands with soap and warm running water before you begin preparing any food, including fruits and vegetables.
- Take extra care to clean thoroughly fruits and vegetables. You are more likely to get sick from dirty produce so be sure to wash them properly.
- When buying and storing fruits and vegetables, always keep them separate from raw foods such as meat, poultry and seafood. Juices from raw foods can be contaminated with germs that cause illness.
- Before eating fresh fruits and vegetables, always wash them in a dilute dish soap solution and then rinse in clean running water. Washing helps remove germs, as well as traces of certain pesticides on the surface. The most important steps in minimizing the risk of contaminants are proper washing, good agitation and a thorough rinse.
- To be safer, you can rinse produce with a sanitizer after washing and rinsing with water. You can use a commercially prepared vegetable/fruit sanitizer or a dilute bleach solution. The solution can be made by adding one teaspoon (5 ml) of household bleach to one quart (1 litre) of water.
- When washing fruits and vegetables, cut away any damaged or bruised areas since harmful germs can grow there. Throw away any rotten fruits and vegetables.
- Always wash fruits and vegetables that have a rind before peeling or preparing them, such as pineapples, cantaloupe, oranges, melons and squash. Although the skin and outer surfaces protect them, germs can grow if the surface gets broken, pierced or cut, especially in melons and tomatoes.
- Wash and scrub fruits and vegetables that have firm, rough surfaces such as potatoes, using a clean scrub brush for produce.

- Always discard the outer leaves of leafy vegetables grown in or near the ground, such as lettuce and cabbage. The outer leaves are more likely to be contaminated with germs.
- In the kitchen, use one cutting board for fresh produce and use a separate one for raw animal foods. If you do not have two cutting boards, then be sure to wash your cutting board well with hot, soapy water after preparing any raw animal food. After rinsing the cutting board with water, sanitize it with a dilute bleach solution.
- Refrigerate fresh fruits and vegetables after peeling, cutting or cooking. Discard them if left at room temperature for two hours.
- Raw sprouted seed products, such as bean sprouts, radish sprouts, alfalfa sprouts, mung beans and others, may carry germs that cause illness. Always cook these before eating because it is difficult to wash sprouted seeds.
- Those being treated with immune-suppressing medications.
- Children under 2 years of age.
- Pregnant women and their unborn or newborn babies.
- Those with a history of problematic use of alcohol or drugs.

### For More Information

For more information on food safety, see the following BC HealthFiles:

[#59a Food Safety: Ten Easy Steps to Make Food Safe](#)

[#59c Food Safety: Instructions on Food Labels](#)

[#76 Foods to Avoid for People at Risk of Food-borne Illness](#)



**BC Centre for Disease Control**  
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### Special Considerations for People with Weakened Immune Systems

People with weakened immune systems should cook fruits and vegetables, especially if grown in or on the ground. If fruits and vegetables are eaten raw, it is critical to make these safe to eat and to follow the above steps always.

People with weakened or undeveloped immune systems include:

- Elderly persons.
- People with AIDS, cancer, kidney disease, and certain other chronic diseases.
- Those with autoimmune disorders, such as lupus.
- Those who have had surgery to remove the spleen.

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- Deaf and hearing-impaired, call 1-866-889-4700
- Pharmacist available 5pm to 9am every day
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