



# Produce Safety

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Fresh produce is an essential part of a healthy diet because it is an important source of vitamins, minerals, fibres, and antioxidants. Because most fruits and vegetables are grown in a natural environment, they can be exposed to a wide range of microorganisms such as bacteria and viruses. Most of these microorganisms do not represent a human health risk, but can cause spoilage. Since produce is usually eaten raw and there are a limited number of practices to effectively control or eliminate pathogens prior to consumption, fruits and vegetables can be a potential source of foodborne illnesses.

Harmful microorganisms, such as bacteria, viruses, and parasites can contaminate fruits and vegetables. Produce may become contaminated in a variety of ways including through the soil, irrigation water, equipment, humans and animals (animal wastes used as fertilizers), unsanitary processing methods and even sometimes by the final consumer.



Fresh fruits and vegetables have been occasionally linked to outbreaks of foodborne illnesses. Pathogens associated with these outbreaks include: *Salmonella*, *Shigella*, *E. coli* O157, hepatitis A, noroviruses, *Cyclospora*, and *Cryptosporidium*, although other microorganisms have been involved as well.

Everyone is at risk for foodborne illness, however young children, the elderly, chronically ill people, and those whose immune system is compromised are at high risk. The most common symptoms of a foodborne illness include fever, nausea, vomiting, abdominal pain and diarrhea. In rare circumstances, infections can result in more severe illness and death.

# What is the Government of Canada doing about the Safety of Fresh Produce?

The Government of Canada works with industry to help identify best practices that can be used to help prevent contamination of fresh produce throughout the food system. In addition, inspection and enforcement activities conducted by the Canadian Food Inspection Agency work to ensure that steps taken by producers, manufacturers and importers have been effective and that the foods available to Canadians are safe. Health Canada has a mandate to protect the health of Canadians through the development of policies, guidelines, standards and regulations. The Canadian Food Inspection Agency enforces these regulations and uses the policies, guidelines and standards in their assessment of industry food safety programs.

Health Canada is revising its current policy [Managing Health Risk Associated with the Consumption of Unpasteurized Fruit Juice/Cider Products](#).

Collaborative research is currently being carried out by Health Canada, Canadian Food Inspection Agency, Public Health Agency of Canada, and Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada to improve produce safety.

Health Canada has formed a working group on the microbial safety of produce in Canada which comprises representatives from Health Canada, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, Agriculture and Agri-food Canada, Canadian Horticultural Council, and Canadian Produce Marketing Association. The working group exchanges information on current activities, initiatives and developments on issues related to the microbiological safety of produce in Canada and North America, and also discusses research needs for microbiological hazards associated with fresh produce. The group created the "Top 10" list of research needs and ranked all identified research topics into three categories. The list of prioritized research topics is available in the report titled [Prioritized List of Microbial Research Needs for Fresh Produce in Canada](#).

Educational material and campaigns are also developed by Health Canada, in collaboration with the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada and other government organizations, [the Canadian Partnership for Consumer Food Safety Education](#) and industry associations.

## Additional Resources

The following links will provide you with more information on topics about Produce Safety:

- [Risks Associated with Sprouts](#)
- [Sprouted Beans and Seeds](#)
- [Unpasteurized Fruit Juice and Cider](#)

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