



## **Safe Produce**

Fresh fruits and vegetables are an important part of a healthy diet. They provide vitamins, minerals and fiber to help keep your body healthy. Occasionally, fresh fruits and vegetables can become contaminated with harmful bacteria or viruses, which are also known as pathogens. Examples of pathogens include Salmonella, E. coli and Hepatitis A. This contamination can occur at any point from the field to your table. If eaten, contaminated fruit and vegetables can cause foodborne illness. Common signs of foodborne illness include nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, headaches and fever. These symptoms usually appear within 12 to 72 hours. Although foodborne illness can be serious, there are several easy steps you can take to help keep fresh fruits and vegetables safe to eat.

### **Shopping**

When shopping for fresh produce, avoid items that are too bruised, damaged or moldy or that show signs of insect damage. (Refer to HACAP guide) Bruises and cuts may allow pathogens to enter a fruit or vegetable. Damaged fruits and vegetables may also spoil faster. Keep fresh fruits and vegetables separate from raw beef, poultry, fish and seafood. Also, keep fresh produce separate from household cleaning supplies.

### **Storing**

Once you have brought your produce home, it is important that you store it properly at room temperature or in the refrigerator to prevent foodborne illness. Refer to your HACAP produce storage guide to ensure you are storing your produce correctly.

#### **At room temperature**

To store fruits and vegetables safely at room temperature:

- Do not wash them before storage. Instead, wash them when you are ready to use them. If the produce is very dirty, rinse it and then dry it well before storing it.
- Keep your storage areas clean and pest-free. Store fruits and vegetables in bowls, bins or mesh bags off the floor.
- Keep the produce in a cool, dry, dark place. Do not store it near heat sources such as ovens, water heaters, hot water pipes or direct sunlight. Heat causes food to spoil more quickly.



- Store fresh fruits and vegetables away from household cleaning products. These products are poisonous.
- Do not place heavy items on top of fruits and vegetables because bruising can cause spoilage.
- Check stored fruits and vegetables often. Throw away items that show signs of spoilage such as mold or slime. When in doubt about the safety of a fruit or vegetable, throw it out!

### **In the refrigerator**

All fruits and vegetables must be stored in the refrigerator once they are cut or peeled. Pre-cut fruits and vegetables bought at the store should also be refrigerated immediately.

Here are some tips on storing fruits and vegetables safely in the refrigerator:

- Do not wash whole fruits and vegetables before storing them.
- Be sure to store all fruits and vegetables in the crisper or produce drawer. Do not overload the crisper. It is best to buy only the amount of produce you will use within a few days.
- Cover cut fruits and vegetables tightly with plastic wrap. Or, store them in sealed plastic bags or clean, air-tight containers.
- Keep fruits and vegetables separate from raw beef, poultry, fish and seafood in the refrigerator. Place raw meats on the bottom shelf of the refrigerator in a tray or pan. This will prevent blood or juices from dripping onto fresh produce.
- Do not place heavy items on top of fruits and vegetables.
- Keep the temperature of your refrigerator at 40 degrees F or below.
- Use a refrigerator thermometer to measure the temperature.
- Clean the refrigerator as needed. Throw out spoiled food and wipe up spills with hot, soapy water.

### **Preparing**

Wash all whole fruits and vegetables before preparing them – even if the skin or rind will not be eaten. This prevents pathogens from being transferred from the rind or skin to the inside of the fruit or vegetable when it is cut. Wash fruits and vegetables in clean, running water. Do



not use detergents, soaps or bleach to wash produce. These may change the taste and could be poisonous. If the fruits and vegetables are firm (such as potatoes or melons), scrub them with a clean, sanitized fruit/vegetable brush. For soft fruits and vegetables (such as tomatoes), gently rub them with your hands to loosen the dirt. Remove and throw away the outer leaves of lettuce and cabbage before washing them. To wash berries, parsley and greens, put them in a clean colander and spray them with a kitchen sink sprayer. Or, gently turn the produce as you hold it under running water. Be sure to turn and gently shake the colander as you wash the produce. When chopping, slicing or peeling fresh produce, use separate cutting boards and utensils for raw meats and fresh produce, or wash and sanitize them between foods. Once cut or peeled, fresh produce should be refrigerated within 2 hours. If it is left at room temperature for more than 2 hours, throw it away.