

## Produce Contamination a Fast-Growing Problem

### PMA, UVVA Partner on Melon Safety



In a joint effort, The United Fresh Fruit & Vegetable Association ([UFFVA](#)), and the Produce Marketing Association ([PMA](#)) have released "Commodity Specific Food Safety Guidelines for the Melon Supply Chain."

Among tips: Use a barrier such as gloves, deli paper or an appropriate utensil to touch cut melons--do not touch cut melons with bare hands; maintain the temperature of cut melons at 41° F or below.

In addition, the UFFVA has released a 32-page, FDA-approved manual on melons, covering all facets of handling, from farm to table.

Operators, be aware! Fresh produce is catching up with poultry as a major culprit in Salmonella infections, according to a recent report by the Center for Science in the Public Interest ([CSPI](#)).

Consider the stats: From 1990 to 2001, poultry accounted for 121 outbreaks of Salmonella, while fresh produce accounted for 80. Between 2002-2003, produce accounted for 31 Salmonella outbreaks and poultry for 29.

Top culprits in produce Salmonella transmission are lettuce, melons (cantaloupes, in particular), sprouts, tomatoes, green onions and other fruit- and vegetable-containing dishes, says CSPI. In 2004, there were three separate outbreaks involving 561 Salmonella infections linked to contaminated Roma tomatoes. From 2000-2002, Salmonella-contaminated cantaloupe imported from Mexico sickened 155 and killed two.

Nor is Salmonella the only threat. Between 1990 and 2003, produce triggered 554 outbreaks of food-borne illnesses of various types, sickening 28,315 people. Of those 554 outbreaks, only 111 were caused by Salmonella. Other pathogens traced back to produce were E. coli and hepatitis A: In 2003, for example, green onions in salsa from a Pennsylvania ChiChi's restaurant transmitted hepatitis A to 555 people, killing three; the same year, E. coli in a bagged salad mix sickened more than 50 restaurant patrons in the San Diego area.

All told, fruits and vegetables are now responsible for more large-scale outbreaks of food-borne illnesses than meat, poultry or eggs, according to a recent Wall Street Journal article, which cited statistics from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. This may be because meat-related E. coli infections are on the decline.



## 10 Safe Salad Practices

1. Don't buy bruised or damaged produce.
2. Don't accept fresh-cut items that have not been kept properly refrigerated by suppliers.
3. Produce that needs refrigeration should be put away promptly.
4. Wash hands with warm water and soap for at least 20 seconds before and after handling fresh produce.
5. Rinse fresh fruits and vegetables under running tap water, including those with skins and rinds that are not consumed. Don't use soap or detergents.
6. Scrub firm produce, such as melons and cucumbers, with a clean produce brush. Cut away any bruised or damaged areas.
7. Use one clean cutting board for fresh produce and separate ones for raw meat, poultry, and seafood. Color-coded boards are ideal.
8. Wash surfaces often. Cutting boards, dishes, utensils and countertops should be washed with hot soapy water and sanitized after coming in contact with fresh produce, raw meat, poultry or seafood. Sanitize after use with a solution of 1 teaspoon chlorine bleach in one quart of water.
9. Fresh produce should be refrigerated within two hours of peeling or cutting. Leftover cut produce should be discarded if left at room temperature for more than two hours.
10. Keep fresh fruits and vegetables separate from raw meat in the cooler.

Source: *Food and Drug Administration*