



Volunteer Leader Training Guide

Produce Food Safety

Serena M. Fuller, Ph.D., RDN, Associate Professor - Nutrition and Food Safety

Target Audience

- EHC Members
- Adults

Objectives

Participants will be able to:

- Identify safe produce handling, washing and storing practices.
- Demonstrate safe produce handling, washing and storing practices.

Handouts

- Produce Food Safety Activities Handout
- *A Consumer's Guide to Safe Handling of Locally Grown Produce*, FSFCS05 (available through print on demand and at <http://www.uaex.edu/publications/PDF/FSFCS05.pdf>)
- Evaluation Form

Advanced Preparation

- Prior to teaching the lesson, study produce handling PowerPoint and study the handouts.
- Order copies of *A Consumer's Guide to Safe Handling of Locally Grown Produce*; make copies of Produce Food Safety Activities Handout and Evaluation Form.
- Obtain at least one tough-skinned fruit (fresh, model, cut-outs, etc.), bagged pre-washed produce (fresh, model, cut-outs, etc.), vegetable brush, cutting board, knives and colander.

Optional Preparation

- Purchase colored index cards or paper; need two colors to represent “True” and “False” during trivia activity.
- Create raw meat representation from items on hand.
- Bring grocery bags and other items such as empty egg carton, milk carton, canned goods, etc., for safe produce packing demonstration.

Suggestions for Teaching

- Encourage participants to discuss any experiences they may have had with foodborne illnesses (i.e., food poisoning).
- Watch USDA Produce Food Safety video.

Main Teaching Points

Introduction to Produce Safety

Annually, one in six people become sick from foodborne illnesses. Fresh produce is the leading cause of foodborne illnesses, which is why taking appropriate safety precautions when consuming fresh produce is so important. All produce is at risk for contamination throughout the manufacturing, transporting, storing and even preparation processes. Eliminating the possible contamination once the produce is in the consumer's hands is the goal. Consumers can reduce the risk of foodborne illness by following six easy rules:

- ✓ Check
- ✓ Clean
- ✓ Rinse
- ✓ Separate
- ✓ Chill
- ✓ Throw away

Rules for Handling Fresh Produce: Check and Clean

Check fresh fruits and vegetables before purchasing. Bruised, cut or oozing produce indicates the potential for bacteria to enter into the “meat” of the produce, so there's no washing it off. Checking your produce beforehand can prevent you from grabbing contaminated produce that you'll just have to throw out when you get home anyway, so checking before you buy can save you money.

Always wash your hands before and after handling food items, using the restroom or touching unclean surfaces like doorknobs, people and unsanitized countertops. Bear in mind that whatever is on your hands can get into your food. For safest hand washing method:

- ✓ Use warm water and soap.
- ✓ Wash for 20 seconds, or the amount of time it takes to sing the Happy Birthday song.

Make sure to wipe down cutting boards and countertops with warm soapy water, and be sure to use clean knives, peelers or other utensils to cut or peel your fruits or vegetables.

Rules for Washing Fresh Produce: Rinse

When washing fresh fruits and vegetables, be sure to:

- ✓ Use running water as opposed to wiping it off.
- ✓ Wash fresh fruits and vegetables even if you're not going to eat the skin. Peeling or cutting through the uncleaned skin from a fruit or vegetable allows the bacteria from the skin of the produce to seep into the part you plan to eat.

- ✓ Use a scrub brush when washing tough-skinned produce.

It is actually recommended that you do not wash produce that is bagged and labeled as “pre-washed” because it is already cleaned and the more you handle it, the more likely it is to become contaminated.

Rules for Storing Fresh Produce: Separate, Chill and Throw Away

Contamination can occur at any given point before you get your fruits and vegetables home and cleaned, so keeping your produce separate from your meats and eggs and also any household cleaners/chemicals that you may purchase in the grocery store is always a safe bet.

- ✓ A great way to do this is to bag your produce and your meats in separate bags.

Even in the refrigerator, raw meats, seafood and eggs can still contaminate your fresh fruits and vegetables. The best way to avoid this is to:

- ✓ Store your raw meats at the bottom of the refrigerator and keep your fruits and vegetables above and away from those meats.
- ✓ Use a separate cutting board for raw meats and produce.
- ✓ Never use the same knife for raw meats and fresh produce without thoroughly washing it in warm soapy water after each use.

Your refrigerator should always be set at or below 40 degrees Fahrenheit because bacteria thrive at temperatures above 40 degrees. Keeping a thermometer in your fridge is a great way to make sure your refrigerator is set at the right temperature. Remember, bacteria thrive at room temperature, so be sure to:

- ✓ Refrigerate any peeled or cut produce in an airtight container within two hours of cutting or peeling.

Why? Because when you cut produce, you expose the “meat” of the produce to potential pathogens that can’t be washed off. Pathogens can “eat” the “meat” and grow too, making the shelf life of cut produce shorter than nonprepared, whole produce. Some noted exceptions of produce not to store in your refrigerator, for quality purposes only, are bananas, tomatoes, potatoes, fresh ginger root, fresh garlic and onions.

If there’s a chance your fresh produce may be rotten or may have been touching raw meats in the refrigerator, **DON’T EAT IT!** It’s best to go ahead and throw it away to make sure you and your family avoid foodborne illnesses.

References

- www.uaex.edu
- www.Foodsafety.gov
- www.fns.usda.gov
- www.Fightbac.org