



Reduce risk linked to fresh produce

I've read about the deaths associated with tainted cantaloupe. How are you supposed to protect yourself against that kind of contamination?

You've identified a problem that has concerned food safety experts for years. Standard guidance includes the advice to "cook thoroughly" to kill any pathogens that may be lurking in food — but what happens when you're eating foods, such as fresh fruits and vegetables, that aren't cooked first? You can take some common-sense steps to reduce your risk (see below), but some risk still exists.

The type of bacteria associated with the cantaloupe outbreak, which killed at least 23 people and caused 116 illnesses, is of special concern. Although *Listeria monocytogenes* generally causes fewer outbreaks than other types of bacteria (such as *Salmonella* or *Campylobacter*), it can be particularly serious: one in five who are infected can die. Plus, symptoms often take up to two months to appear, making it difficult to trace to a particular food. And unlike most other foodborne pathogens, *Listeria* can grow even under refrigeration. People most at risk from *Listeria* are the elderly, pregnant women and others with compromised immune systems, such as those with cancer, HIV/AIDS or diabetes.

The Food and Drug Administration offers guidance to reduce your risk:

- Rinse all fruits and vegetables under running water just before

eating, cutting or cooking. For firm produce, such as melons or cucumbers, scrub with a clean produce brush.

- Keep your refrigerator as cold as possible (as long as the food in it doesn't freeze). Although *Listeria* can grow in the refrigerator, it grows more slowly under colder conditions. Use a refrigerator thermometer to double-check the temperature is at least under 40 degrees F.

- Wrap or cover refrigerated foods with plastic wrap, plastic bags, foil or covered containers. Don't let foods leak juices onto other foods.

- Eat precooked foods and leftovers promptly — within three days. The longer they stay in the refrigerator, the longer *Listeria* has a chance to grow.

- Clean and sanitize the shelves and walls of your refrigerator regularly. Use warm water and liquid soap. It's a good idea to follow up with kitchen sanitizer once a month or so.

- Keep kitchen surfaces clean and sanitized. Wipe counters often, and wash cutting boards with warm soapy water after each use. Follow both with kitchen sanitizer, available at grocery stores, or make your own with 1 teaspoon of unscented bleach in 1 quart of water. Spray generously, and let air dry or wipe with a clean paper towel after 10 minutes.

- Use hot water when washing dishcloths and kitchen towels, as well as cloth grocery bags.

Chow Line is a service of Ohio State University Extension and the Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center. Send questions to Chow Line, c/o Martha Filipic, 2021 Coffey Road, Columbus, OH, 43210-1044, or filipic.3@cfaes.osu.edu.



THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY
OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY
EXTENSION

OHIO AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH
AND DEVELOPMENT CENTER

**For the week of
Oct. 23, 2011**

By Martha Filipic

614-292-9833

filipic.3@cfaes.osu.edu

Editor:

This column was reviewed by Lydia Medeiros, food safety specialist with Ohio State University Extension, scientist with the Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center, and professor of human nutrition in the College of Education and Human Ecology.

**Communications and
Technology
News and Marketing**
2021 Coffey Road
Columbus, OH 43210-1044
614-292-2011

208 Research Services
Building
1680 Madison Ave.
Wooster, OH 44691-4096
330-263-3780

Ohio State University Extension embraces human diversity and is committed to ensuring that all research and related educational programs are available to clientele on a nondiscriminatory basis without regard to race, color, religion, sex, age, national origin, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, disability, or veteran status. This statement is in accordance with United States Civil Rights Laws and the USDA. *Keith L. Smith, Ph.D., Associate Vice President for Agricultural Administration and Director, Ohio State University Extension*
TDD No. 800-589-8292 (Ohio only) or 614-292-1868