



**For the week of
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Editor:

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Wash those fruits and veggies

Some cantaloupe was recently recalled because of salmonella. I thought that was mostly a problem with chicken and eggs. How did it get on fruit?

Salmonella, like many microorganisms, is pervasive. According to the Centers for Disease Control, 40,000 cases of salmonellosis are reported each year. Many more mild cases likely go unreported — some authorities estimate up to 4 million cases a year.

No matter what kind of food is contaminated, Salmonella is always animal- or human-based. The microorganism lives in intestines and is transmitted through feces — that's why it's so often associated with animal products. With fresh produce, contamination possibly comes from bird droppings, manure in fertilizer, or soil or water contaminated by wild or domestic animals. But humans can also easily spread it, especially if they don't wash their hands properly before handling food or after using the bathroom, changing diapers, handling raw meat or touching pets.

Cooking foods to 165 degrees Fahrenheit for at least 15 seconds kills Salmonella bacteria, but fresh fruits and vegetables often aren't cooked before eating. That's why it's extremely important to rinse

fresh fruits and vegetables thoroughly before consuming them. That's true even for produce with inedible rinds, like cantaloupe. When you cut such fruit into pieces, any contamination on the outside of the rind can easily be spread to the part you do eat.

Other safety tips:

- Wash surfaces often. After handling fresh produce, raw meat, poultry or seafood, wash cutting boards, dishes, utensils and counter tops. Use hot soapy water, then sanitize. It's a good idea to keep a spray bottle with 1 teaspoon of chlorine bleach in a quart of water for sanitizing.

- When using a cooler for picnics and other outings, do not consume ice that has come in contact with fresh produce or other raw products.

- Throw away leftover cut produce — as well as other perishable items — if they have been left at room temperature for more than two hours.

About 1,000 people die each year from salmonellosis. Infants, children, the elderly and anyone whose immune system is weakened from another condition are at most risk.

Chow Line is a service of The Ohio State University. Send questions to Chow Line, c/o Martha Filipic, 2021 Coffey Road, Columbus, OH 43210-1044, or filipic.3@osu.edu.