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The Everclean Report

Produce Safety: Washing Procedure for Thin-Skinned Produce

Special Interest Articles:

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In light of the recent salmonella outbreak in tomatoes, we wanted to provide a washing procedure for thin-skinned produce such as tomatoes. Produce can be contaminated by bacteria from soil, water, and animals. Contamination from humans can occur at any time from before harvest to right before consumption. Washing thin-skinned produce in standing water and/or chemicals is not always recommended, since thin-skinned produce have a permeable membrane and can absorb whatever they are soaked in.

To reduce the risk of foodborne illness from thin-skinned produce:

- Do not use damaged or spoiled produce.
- Start with washing hands for 20 seconds with warm water and soap and use clean utensils and cutting surfaces.
- Wash in running water.
- Use a paper towel to scrub the produce surface.
- Rinse with running water.
- Pat dry with a clean paper towel.

Following your company policy & best practices is the key to keeping thin-skinned produce safe.

Time for Chill!

There is no better time to think about "cooling" than now since we're already in the hot blistering days of summer. So, what are some good "cooling" food safety rules?

Refrigerate perishable foods promptly. Even steaming hot foods can go into the refrigerator. However, stirring food to release excess heat is a good practice. Remember to store hot foods in shallow containers to speed cooling. Never store hot food under cold food.

Use your refrigerator thermometer. They aren't expensive and you should have extras available. Know if your refrigerator's temperature is too warm. Place the thermometer in the warmest part of the refrigerator. For potentially hazardous food, the safe temperature is 41°F or colder. Many refrigeration companies recommend setting the thermostat to 38°F or less.

Don't jam-pack the cooler. Make sure there's enough room for air to circulate. Maintain at least 6 inches of clearance under the racks and food containers. Do not push items against the cooler walls.

Pitch, pitch, pitch. Don't keep food too long. It's better to throw food away than to jeopardize someone's health. The longer you've had the food, the greater the chance that dangerous bacteria might be there. In most states, ready-to-eat (RTE), potentially hazardous food (PHF) held longer than 24 hours must be discarded after 7 days when the cooler is 41°F.

Bad Bug: *Salmonella Saintpaul*

Did you know? *S. Saintpaul* is an uncommon strain among many strains of Salmonella. According to the CDC since April there have been 756 persons infected by *S. Saintpaul*. Prior to that there were only 3 persons for the same period last year (2007). The CDC estimated that there are a total of about 1.4 million illnesses, 15,000 hospitalizations, and 400 deaths from *Salmonella* infection in the United States every year. Approximately 40,000 of those infections are confirmed each year by isolation of the Salmonella strain. Salmonellosis is more common in summer than in winter.

Signs and Symptoms Persons infected with *Salmonella* may develop diarrhea, fever, and abdominal cramps 12-72 hours after infection. The illness usually lasts 4-7 days. Although most people recover without treatment, severe infections may occur. Infants, elderly persons, and those with impaired immune systems are more likely than others to develop severe illness.

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