



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

News Release

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PREP PRODUCE TO AVOID FOOD-BORNE ILLNESS

HONOLULU — The Hawai'i State Department of Health (DOH) is reminding island residents to carefully clean produce to minimize the risk of food-borne illness. This is particularly important during the summer months, when food-borne illness tends to increase.

Last month DOH and Lt. Governor James R. "Duke" Aiona, Jr. launched a statewide public awareness campaign called *Fruits and Veggies. Good Choice!* to encourage Hawai'i residents to eat one more serving of fruit and one more serving of veggies every day. But while fruits and veggies provide health benefits, during last year's national outbreak of E. coli from contaminated spinach, consumers became more aware that it's possible to become sick by eating something that's supposed to be healthy.

"A diet that's rich in fruits and vegetables is important for a healthy lifestyle. Just be sure that what you consume is adequately cleaned," says Lance Wong, supervisor of the Hawai'i State Department of Health Food and Drug Branch. "No matter what, wash it before you eat it.

"Before you prepare produce, wash your hands well using soap and water. Then wash your produce carefully, including vegetables that come in packages or bags that are labeled as 'pre-washed'," said Wong.

(more)

“There’s no need to use soap to clean produce but you should let water run through lettuce leaves, and use a vegetable brush to scrub off any seen or unseen dirt on firm produce such as melons, cucumbers or potatoes.

“It’s not just the food that requires thorough cleaning,” Wong added. “It’s important to use soap and hot water to wash counter tops, cutting boards, serving plates and utensils. Doing so will minimize the risk of transferring bacteria from one surface to the next.”

There’s a risk of cross contamination if raw juice from poultry or meat is spilled onto a counter, the counter is not well cleaned, and produce is placed on the same cutting surface.

Harmful bacteria that may be in the soil or water where produce is grown can also come into contact with fruits and vegetables causing contamination. Contaminated produce – even fruit and vegetable juices made from contaminated produce – can cause food poisoning.

Symptoms of food-borne illnesses include diarrhea, abdominal cramping, fever, blood or even pus in the stool, headache, vomiting and severe exhaustion. These symptoms may occur shortly after eating or be delayed for several days or even weeks.

According to the FDA, children, the elderly, and those with weakened immune systems are particularly vulnerable to food-borne illness from raw bean, alfalfa, clover, or radish sprouts. Sprouts should be cooked before they’re consumed. Rinsing sprouts with water is not enough to remove bacteria.

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