Food Safety for Fruits and Vegetables Restaurant Safety Meeting Kit



WHAT’S AT STAKE

Fresh fruits and vegetables taste great and are healthy. Food establishments, including restaurants, grocery stores, fast food chains, and others, are stepping up to meet this demand. As the demand for produce goes up, so does the risk of spreading foodborne pathogens.

WHAT’S THE DANGER

FOODBORNE HAZARDS ASSOCIATED WITH FRUITS AND VEGETABLES IN RESTAURANTS

- **Contamination during harvesting and transportation:** Fruits and vegetables can become contaminated with harmful bacteria, such as E. coli and Salmonella, during the harvesting and transportation process. This can occur due to poor hygiene practices, contaminated water or soil, or contact with animals.
- **Improper storage:** Fruits and vegetables need to be stored at the correct temperature to prevent bacterial growth. If they are stored at temperatures that are too warm, such as in a warm kitchen, they can quickly become unsafe to eat.
- **Cross-contamination:** Fruits and vegetables can become contaminated if they come into contact with other foods that contain harmful bacteria. For example, if a cutting board is used to prepare raw meat and is not properly cleaned and sanitized before being used to cut vegetables, the vegetables can become contaminated.
- **Improper handling:** Proper handling of fruits and vegetables is critical to prevent contamination. This includes washing hands before and after handling produce, using clean utensils and cutting boards, and storing fruits and vegetables in a way that prevents contamination.
- **Pesticide residues:** Fruits and vegetables can contain pesticide residues if they were not properly washed or if the pesticide was not used according to the manufacturer’s instructions.

HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF

FRESH PRODUCE – IS IT SAFE?

Produce is commonly eaten fresh and raw. Pathogens are usually only on the surface of the produce, so if it is washed properly, it will be safe to eat. But if produce isn't washed properly or becomes contaminated after washing, it can become infected with pathogens.

Campylobacter, Salmonella, Listeria monocytogenes, and E. coli are all dangerous pathogens. They are not found naturally on fresh produce, so how do they get there? These bacteria can be spread through untreated water used to irrigate a farm, or contaminated water in a tank used to wash produce after it is picked. Produce can also become contaminated when people touch it with unclean hands, or if something else contaminates it, like raw animal products.

SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS FOR RESTAURANTS WITH FRUITS AND VEGETABLES

Washed properly: Fruits and vegetables should be washed thoroughly before they are served or used in food preparation. This is important because raw produce can harbor bacteria, viruses, and other harmful microorganisms that can cause foodborne illnesses.

Stored appropriately: Restaurants should store fruits and vegetables in a clean and dry location, separate from raw meat, poultry, and seafood. This can help prevent cross-contamination, which is when harmful bacteria from one food item spreads to another.

Freshness: Restaurants should ensure that the fruits and vegetables they serve are fresh and not spoiled.

Preparation: When preparing fruits and vegetables, restaurants should use clean utensils, cutting boards,

Cooked appropriately: Some fruits and vegetables, such as leafy greens, sprouts, and melons, are more prone to contamination and should be cooked thoroughly before they are served.

Look for fresh produce: Choose restaurants that use fresh produce and avoid those that use canned or pre-packaged fruits and vegetables, which may have additives or preservatives.

Wash the produce: Even if the restaurant claims to have washed the produce, it's always a good idea to wash it again before eating. This will help remove any dirt, bacteria, or pesticides that may be present.

Avoid cross-contamination: Make sure that fruits and vegetables are not placed on the same cutting board or prepared with the same utensils as meat or poultry. This can help prevent the spread of harmful bacteria.

Choose cooked vegetables: If you're concerned about the safety of raw fruits and vegetables, opt for cooked options instead. Cooking can help kill any bacteria or viruses that may be present.

Ask questions: If you're unsure about the safety of the produce, don't be afraid

to ask the restaurant staff. They should be able to provide information on where the produce comes from and how it’s prepared.

SAFETY REMINDERS FOR RESTAURANT STAFF

- Keep fruits and vegetables that will be eaten raw separate from other foods such as raw meat, poultry or seafood – and from kitchen utensils used for those products.
- Wash cutting boards, dishes, utensils and countertops with hot water and soap after preparing raw meat, poultry and seafood products and before preparing produce that will not be cooked. Another option is to keep separate cutting boards for raw produce and raw meats.
- For added protection, kitchen sanitizers can be used on cutting boards and countertops periodically. A solution of one teaspoon of chlorine bleach to one quart of water may be used as a disinfectant.
- Plastic and other non-porous cutting boards may be washed in the dishwasher.

FINAL WORD

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), produce (including fruits and vegetables) is responsible for nearly half of all foodborne illnesses in the United States. The most common causes of produce-related outbreaks are contamination with harmful bacteria, such as Salmonella, E. coli, and Listeria.