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## Sprouts: Safe Handling Practices for Consumers<sup>1</sup>

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Sprouts have become regular items in salad bars and produce departments during the past few years. However, they have been linked to a few outbreaks of foodborne illnesses. Although the federal government and sprout producers are working together to ensure safety of the product, consumers must take some steps to protect themselves. Understanding how sprouts are produced and handled before they reach your plate, and making good decisions may help reduce your risk of foodborne illness from sprouts.



### Why are there problems?

- Sprouts can be grown from many types of seeds: alfalfa, radish, broccoli, mung bean, wheat, and soybean.
- Since seed sprouts are produced as agricultural commodities, they do not have the same cleanliness requirements as processed foods.
- A wide variety of pathogens (organisms that cause illness) have been found in seed sprouts.
- Many species of pathogens can survive on the seeds for months.
- It is very difficult to detect these pathogens when they are present in low numbers.

### When Sprouts are Grown

- Sprouts are grown in moist and warm conditions.
- These conditions are also ideal for bacteria to multiply.
- Many interventions have been tried to reduce the bacterial growth and contamination in sprout. However, none of these methods can totally reduce harmful bacteria on sprouts.

### When you shop

- Sprouts must be in the refrigerated section of the store. This helps to control bacterial growth.

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- Examine the package carefully for any sign of spoilage and check the "sell by" date. Do **not** purchase if the date has passed.

### During Preparation

- Wash hands with hot, soapy water before and after:
  - handling fresh produce
  - handling raw meat, poultry, or seafood
  - using the bathroom
  - changing diapers
  - handling pets
- Rinse sprouts with cool tap water just before preparing or eating. Do **not** use soap or detergents.
- Washing reduces bacterial population on the surface, but does not eliminate all the bacteria.
- Pregnant women, and persons under age 5 or over 65, persons with AIDS or using medications that cause depression of immunity should **never** consume raw sprouts. Susceptible individuals can enjoy cooked or blanched sprouts.
- Wash cutting boards, dishes, utensils, and counter tops often. Use hot soapy water and rinse well. **Sanitize** them after contact with fresh produce, or raw meat, poultry, or seafood (see box).

<p><b>To sanitize cutting boards, dishes, and utensils:</b></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Mix one teaspoon chlorine bleach in one quart water.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Pour the mixture onto surface and let sit at least one minute.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Rinse well with hot running water.</li> </ul>



- Sanitize kitchen sink frequently to prevent a build up of microbes.
- **Do not** cross contaminate! Use clean cutting boards and utensils for fresh produce.
- If you can, use a separate cutting board for raw meat, poultry, and seafood.
- **Do not** consume ice that has come in contact with fresh produce or other raw products.
- Use a cooler with ice or ice gel packs when you take perishable foods outdoors. This includes sprouts.

Following these steps will help reduce your risk of foodborne illness from sprouts.

<p><b>For more information</b>, you can visit the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) website at: <a href="http://www.fda.gov">http://www.fda.gov</a> or call FDA Consumer Inquiries at 1-888-SAFEFOOD (a toll-free number).</p>
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