

Food Safety Questions in the Times of COVID-19



Is fresh produce from the grocery store safe?

Produce in the grocery stores or other markets (and the garden) needs the same care and cleaning as usual to be safe. An extra precaution you can take with purchased raw foods is turn a plastic produce bag inside out, put your hand inside and pick up the head of cabbage, for instance. Then, wrap the bag around the cabbage with your free hand. The produce won't be exposed to any other germs while in the store or on your way home. When you get home, wash your hands, then open the baggie and remove the produce. Carefully dispose of the plastic baggie and sanitize the area where it sat on the counter. Wash your hands, again. Rinse and rub produce with your hands under cool, running water. Use a dedicated produce brush for hard, bumpy surfaces such as cantaloupe and fingertips for delicate leaves. Place the cabbage in a clean bag and store in the refrigerator until you use it. Wash your hands. Run your produce brush through the dishwasher or hand wash in hot soapy water and sanitize it after you have cleaned your produce. Still hesitant about fresh produce? Blanching, cooking, stir-fry, and roasting all kill this virus.



Produce area sign: <https://oregonstate.box.com/s/p600c1ijmi65rztn1nhyb3b88bbkdgao>

Can I use a vinegar rinse for my fresh produce? Barb Ingham, University of Wisconsin Extension Food Safety and Food Preservation Specialist has some timely tips from her April 2, 2020 blog, *Safe and Healthy: Preparing and Preserving Food at Home*:

“In this time of the coronavirus, are fresh fruits and vegetables safe to eat? Yes! There is no reason to assume that fresh fruits and vegetables are unsafe because there isn’t any evidence that the coronavirus is transmitted by food. And regardless of where fresh produce originates, around the corner or around the world, fruits and vegetables are a healthy part of the diet.”

“We know that the COVID-19 virus doesn’t appear to last long on organic surfaces like the outside of fruits and vegetables, and it doesn’t appear that we can get sick from ‘eating’ the virus. But there are some general food safety steps that we always recommend when eating or preparing fresh fruits and vegetables.”



“Follow these steps:

- Start by washing your hands with soap and water.
- Rinse fresh fruits and vegetables with clean running water, do not use soap or bleach. Scrub the surfaces of melons, apples or other firm items.
- Drain and dry with a paper towel. Enjoy!

Always rinse fresh fruits and vegetables before eating, or before preparing, includes before peeling.”

“If you want an added safety step, dip rinsed fruits and vegetables in a vinegar solution of 2 cups vinegar + 2 cups water, allow to stand for 1 minute, then rinse again with clean water and dry with a paper towel. Research has shown that this vinegar rinse will help remove harmful bacteria like

Salmonella. Whether the vinegar rinse will destroy the coronavirus we don't yet know, but we do know that it won't hurt."

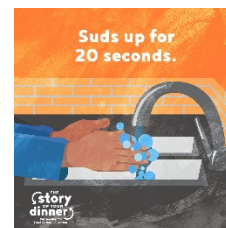
"A new [video](#) from the Partnership for Food Safety Education on washing fresh produce is available for you to share with consumers. And, the Centers for Disease Control has helpful produce safety information in [English](#) and [en Español](#)."

What about takeout and delivery?

As for the pizza... Restaurants/commercial food eateries are following protocols directed by the local county health department and Oregon Department of Agriculture sanitarians and health inspectors to keep your food safe. This includes lots of hand washing by staff and numerous criteria to keep food safe. Your pizza box is folded in a sanitized environment, the hot pizza goes in it, and closed by staff with their cleaned hands. It's placed in a sanitized "hot box" and sent out for delivery. Food delivery has protocols too, whether it is from a restaurant or Meals on Wheels. Check with your local eatery if you have questions or concerns. Precautions that you can take are to pay online or by phone so your delivery can be left on your doorstep. Maintain social distancing of 6 feet, so avoid services that have you sign or pay at the door within the 6-foot boundary. If it sets your mind at ease, you might pick up your pizza so you can control the takeout box contacts. When you get your food to your kitchen, wash your hands, remove the food to serving dishes, then dispose of the takeout container(s). Wash your hands, again and eat! 😊 *The top two things you can do to stop the spread of COVID-19 is wash your hands and maintain social distancing of 6 feet.*

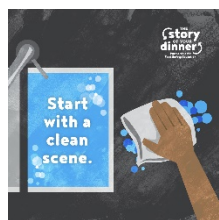
See hand washing and hand sanitizing tips:

<https://oregonstate.box.com/s/fph5g4iusz8t87yckr1w4gq04pfni4vz>



How can I clean surfaces that might be risky?

A great resource for cleaning and sanitizing is www.fightbac.org. The following is an inexpensive method using a product many households have on hand. If you suspect a surface (countertops, sinks, light switches, door handles, etc.) could be risky to touch, wash with hot soapy water, rinse then, wipe it down with a solution of 5 Tablespoons or 1/3 cup unscented, liquid chlorine bleach in 1 gallon of lukewarm water and let it sit for five minutes. It is a strong solution. Do not spray it; it can damage lungs of people and pets. Wear disposable gloves if you have sensitive skin or you do this frequently. If you use reusable gloves, only use them for this purpose. Then, wash your gloves and then your hands. If your bleach bottle has an expired date or has been open for more than 6 months, leave it in the laundry to brighten your whites. Get a fresh bottle for your kitchen. See this [handout](#) for more detailed directions:



<https://oregonstate.box.com/s/5l19xf04o4d9nbs0mtwl4o0strtjylh>

If you use a commercial household cleaning product, follow directions on the label. Watch this video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BVvb_-d6gfQ&feature=emb_title.

Images courtesy of Partnership for Food Safety Education and LSUAgriLife Extension.

2020 Glenda Hyde, MEd Associate Professor of Practice, Oregon State University Extension/Deschutes County. Reviewed by Olivia Davis, MSN, Professional Faculty, Oregon State University Extension/Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs and Jefferson County. Oregon State University strives to ensure that all educational programs, services, activities and materials we offer to the public are identified, developed, delivered, and evaluated in an inclusive, equitable, and socially just manner. OSU Extension Service educational programs, services, activities, and materials are available to all people.