

The *How's* and the *Why's* of Classroom Food Safety

Avoiding Exposure to Food Allergens



How: A few weeks before a tasting, work with the school nurse to make accommodations for students with food allergies. Follow your school's procedures for avoiding exposing allergic students to allergens.

Why: Food allergies cause health problems ranging from minor skin irritations to fatal reactions. There are eight foods that by law must be identified under the ingredients list as an allergen. They are: milk, eggs, fish (e.g., bass, flounder, cod), shellfish (e.g., crab, lobster, shrimp), tree nuts (e.g., almonds, pecans), peanuts, wheat, and soybeans.

Washing Produce



What you'll need:

- Cool, potable (safe to drink) water
- Dedicated produce brush
- Salad spinner or paper towels
- Clean hands

How: Wash produce using running water *right before* it is cooked or eaten raw.

- **For bumpy or grooved produce**, such as cantaloupe and cucumbers, use a scrub brush used only for produce to help remove soil that is in surface nooks and crannies.
- **For leafy greens**, such as lettuce, spinach, and kale, wash under potable running water and dry with a salad spinner or paper towels.
- **Smooth produce**, such as apples, peaches, and tomatoes can be washed under potable running water, using your clean hands to rub the produce's skin.

Why: Pathogens (germs) can collect on produce surfaces at the farm, during shipping, and while being handled by customers and staff at the grocery store. Washing with water reduces the number of pathogens before eating. If you wash before storing, any moisture left on produce can help remaining pathogens multiply and cause food to spoil faster.

Don't wash with anything other than water. Vinegar or lemon juice is not highly effective in reducing pathogens. Soap and chlorine bleach should not be used to wash produce since they are not to be ingested. Fruit and vegetable cleaners are often expensive and are no more effective than running water.

Cleaning & Sanitizing Food Contact Surfaces



What you'll need:

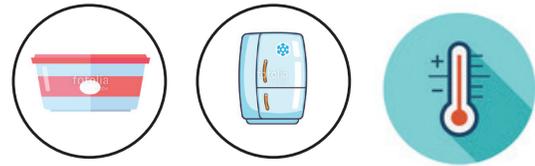
- Paper towels or clean cloths
- Liquid soap or detergent
- Small bucket
- Sanitizing wipes

How:

- 1. Clean:** Before and after food preparation, remove food and other dirt from tables or desks (anything seen by the naked eye). The best way to do this is with a wet, soapy paper towel or clean cloth. You can also cover the surface with a new (not reused) disposable plastic tablecloth.
- 2. Sanitize:** Reduce pathogens on the surface using a sanitizing wipe or other sanitizing product. Air dry after applying.

Why: A surface that is clean of visible dirt may still have pathogens present. Using a sanitizing agent according to package directions will reduce pathogens to a safe level. Sanitizers can only work properly on a clean surface.

Storing Chopped Fruits and Vegetables



What you'll need:

- Storage containers with lids or new (unused) resealable storage bags
- Refrigerator
- Refrigerator thermometer

How: Chill fresh cut produce within two hours of preparing at 40°F or below. To check your refrigerator temperature, place a refrigerator thermometer in the warmer part of the refrigerator (e.g. near where the refrigerator door opens), and check if the thermometer goes above 40°F. If it is above 40°F, change the refrigerator setting, and expect to see the temperature cool down within 24 hours.

Keep fresh cut produce covered and separated from other food and lunchboxes that may be in the refrigerator.

Why: Once produce is cut (e.g. sliced, cubed), pathogens can grow rapidly on the cut surface. A refrigerator set between 33°F and 40°F will reduce or eliminate pathogen growth. Keeping fresh cut produce in a covered container or sealable plastic bag will prevent other items in the refrigerator from spilling and/or contaminating the food you prepared.

For more information on safely handling and serving healthy foods, visit fsnetoolkit.com/foodsafety