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Food safety tips for tomatoes

Tomatoes are part of a [healthy eating pattern](#) and are a great source of vitamins and minerals. Tomatoes are commonly red but also come in a variety of other colours, such as yellow, pink, and purple. Tomatoes are often eaten fresh or used as an ingredient in recipes. Popular types of tomatoes include beefsteak, plum, and cherry tomatoes.

By making sure they are properly handled, washed, prepared, and stored, you can enjoy the health benefits of tomatoes and help prevent food poisoning for yourself and your family.



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Tomatoes and food poisoning

While fresh field tomatoes do not naturally contain bacteria that can make you sick, they can become contaminated because they are grown close to the ground.

Eating tomatoes that have been contaminated with harmful bacteria can make you sick. Contaminated tomatoes have been linked to incidents of food poisoning caused by *Salmonella*.

Tomatoes can become contaminated in the field by:

- soil
- contaminated water
- animals
- improperly composted manure

They can also be contaminated by bacteria:

- during and after harvest from handling, storing, and transporting
- at the grocery store, in the refrigerator, or from counters and cutting boards (through cross-contamination with harmful bacteria from raw meat, poultry, or seafood)

Shopping

- Buy tomatoes that are firm but not hard. Tomatoes continue to ripen after they are picked.
- Avoid tomatoes that have bruising or cuts on the skin.
- Avoid cross-contamination by keeping tomatoes separate from raw meat, poultry, and seafood in the grocery cart.

Did you know?

A tomato is a fruit, not a vegetable.

Chilling/storing

- Store whole tomatoes unwashed and uncovered at room temperature until ripe. Keep out of direct sunlight.
- When tomatoes are ripe, they should be stored in the refrigerator and used within a few days. Avoid cross-contamination by keeping tomatoes separate from raw meat, poultry, and seafood.
- Refrigerate cut/peeled tomatoes and use within three days. Throw away cut/peeled tomatoes that have been left out at room temperature for more than two hours.

Cleaning

Washing your hands and following proper cleaning techniques can help you avoid cross-contamination and prevent the spread of food poisoning.

- Use warm water and soap to thoroughly wash all utensils, countertops, and cutting boards before and after handling tomatoes.

Preparing

Wash your hands thoroughly with warm water and soap for at least 20 seconds, before and after handling tomatoes.

- Throw out any tomatoes that are bruised or spoiled.
- Wash tomatoes under fresh, cool running water. There is no need to use anything other than water to wash tomatoes. Washing them gently with water is as effective as using produce cleansers.
- Don't soak tomatoes in a sink full of water. They can become contaminated by bacteria in the sink.
- Cut out the scar where the stem was, and throw it away.

Did you know?

Every year, more than 4 million Canadians get food poisoning. Many of these illnesses could be prevented by following proper food handling and preparation techniques.

What the Government of Canada does to protect you

The Government of Canada is committed to food safety.

Together with industry, we work to identify best practices that can be used to help prevent contamination of fresh produce throughout the food system, from the field to the store. In addition, inspection and enforcement activities conducted by the [Canadian Food Inspection Agency](#) work to ensure that steps taken by producers, manufacturers, and importers have been effective and that the foods available to Canadians are safe.

For more information

- [Food recalls and advisories](#)
- [Report product-related health and safety concerns](#)
- [Be Food Safe](#)
- [Canadian Food Inspection Agency](#)
- [Food Safety Portal](#)

[For industry and professionals](#)

Date modified:

2019-12-05