

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

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Fresh herbs are highly popular in food preparation because of their flavors. Fresh herbs are often used without cooking to season or garnish ready-to-eat dishes. In recent years some foodborne illnesses have been traced back to fresh herbs such as green onions, cilantro, parsley, and basil. Here are steps you can take to reduce your risk of foodborne illness from fresh herbs.



## Where You Shop:

- Buy fresh herbs that are **not** dirty or damaged.
- Select fresh herbs that are properly refrigerated.

## At Home:

- Refrigerate fresh herbs promptly. Some of the previous illnesses have been traced to prepared fresh herbs that were left at room temperature for a long period of time.
- Leftover prepared fresh herbs should be discarded after two hours at room temperature.

## 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 or wash fresh herbs such as basil, green onions, and parsley with cool running tap water just before preparing or eating. **Do not use soap or detergents.**
- Some commercial vegetable wash solutions for fresh fruits and vegetables may help remove dirt and some bacteria.
- The action of rinsing or washing will help reduce the numbers of harmful bacteria on fresh herbs.
- Cut away damaged pieces before preparing or eating.
- 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).
- Sanitize kitchen sink frequently to avoid a build up of microbes.

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- **Do not** cross contaminate! Use clean cutting boards and utensils for fresh produce.
- Always sanitize the cutting board before it is used to prepare ready-to-eat foods.
- If you can, use separate cutting boards 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 cut fresh fruits and vegetables.

Following these steps will help reduce your risk of foodborne illness from fresh cut produce.



<b>To sanitize cutting boards, dishes, and utensils:</b>
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Mix one teaspoon chlorine bleach in one quart water.
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Pour the mixture onto all surfaces or submerge appropriate items into the above solution and let sit at least one minute.
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Rinse surfaces well with hot running water.
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### For More Information:

Visit the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) website at: <http://www.fda.gov> or call FDA Consumer Inquiries at 1-888-SAFEFOOD (a toll-free number).

Counter tops can be sanitized by using the above solution mix, sanitizing sprays or wipes as an additional safety measure.