



COVID-19 Fact Sheet for Fresh Fruit and Vegetables

CPMA has created the following FAQ document which may be used by members if they are receiving questions from consumers regarding COVID-19 and fresh fruits and vegetables (FF&V's). The questions are a compilation taken from the Canadian and American governments and other public health and food safety sites.

For the most current information it is recommended that individuals utilize the following:

- Canada.ca and click on the COVID-19 link
- The Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) site is Inspection.gc.ca provides information related to food and the coronavirus
- The Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) site is Canada.ca/en/public-health
- For French speaking Canadians, there is a François link at the top right of the pages
- Consumers are also encouraged to contact, or visit the websites, of their provincial and/or local health departments for information specific to their area

FF&V COVID-19 FAQs

1. What is COVID-19?

COVID-19 is a severe respiratory disease caused by the severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2).

2. What are the symptoms of COVID-19?

Symptoms have included:

- cough
- fever
- difficulty breathing
- pneumonia in both lungs
- in severe cases, infection can lead to death

3. What do I do if my child, myself or another family member becomes ill?

Individuals who become ill should self-isolate and call their primary health care provider or local health department for further instructions.

4. Can COVID-19 be transferred via food?

There is currently no evidence that food is a source or route of transmission for the virus. Scientists and food safety authorities across the world are closely monitoring the spread of COVID-19.

However, it is possible to contract COVID-19 by touching a surface or object where the virus is found and then bringing your hand to your mouth, nose or eyes, but this is not the primary means of transmission. Therefore, it is important to always follow the basic rules of hygiene, which include washing your hands thoroughly before eating and cooking, washing food thoroughly before eating, as well as coughing or sneezing into your elbow.

5. How do I know FF&V's are safe?

Producers of FF&V's, like other food producers, follow globally recognized food safety programs to help reduce the risks associated with FF&V's. Since, FF&V's are grown outside or within greenhouses, these food safety programs are specifically designed to deal with the specific hazards which may be found in these environments.

6. FF&V's are often eaten raw so doesn't this make them less safe to eat?

Although FF&V's are often consumed raw, the risk of contracting COVID-19 from them is extremely low. The CFIA, PHAC, US Centre for Disease Control (CDC) and US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) all have statements on their websites stating that food is not a likely source of transmission, which includes FF&V's. As noted in question #9, produce should be washed using only fresh, cold running water.

7. Am I supposed to wash produce which is already cut-up?

That depends on the product. Bagged salads which state pre-washed, triple washed or something similar do not need to be washed again. Bagged spinach, kale or other leafy greens which are single ingredient and not part of a bagged salad should be washed. Cut-up items like celery, carrots or peppers can be washed under fresh, cold running water prior to consumption.

8. Should I use detergent when washing my FF&V's?

No. Washing product under cool running water is best for FF&V's. Using a detergent when washing could lead to the soap being absorbed by the produce. If consumed it could cause gastrointestinal problems.

9. How should I shop for, handle and clean my FF&V's?

Regardless of the current COVID-19 situation, you should follow these guidelines when buying FF&V's. The Canadian Government has a webpage called Produce Safety which provides a list of suggestions for consumers when shopping, handling, storing and using FF&V's. It can be found at:

Canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/general-food-safety-tips/produce-safety

This site includes the following recommendations:

Shopping

- Examine fruits and vegetables carefully and avoid buying items that are bruised or damaged.
- If buying pre-cut or ready-to-eat FF&V's be sure they have been properly refrigerated at 4°C or below. This means they should be displayed in a refrigerated container and not just sitting on top of ice.
- Separate FF&V's from meat, poultry and seafood products in the shopping cart and bags.
- Wash, with soap and water, your reusable grocery bags frequently.

Chilling

- When you get home, refrigerate the FF&V's that need refrigeration. This includes all pre-cut and ready-to-eat produce. Ask your grocer if you are not certain whether specific items need to be refrigerated.
- When you refrigerate fruits and vegetables, keep them separate from meat, poultry, seafood, and their juices.

- Make sure your refrigerator is set at 4 °C (40 °F) or lower. This will keep your food out of the temperature danger zone of 4 °C (40 °F) to 60 °C (140 °F) where bacteria can grow quickly.

Cleaning

- Wash your hands with soap and warm water for at least 20 seconds.
- Cut away any bruised or damaged areas on FF&V's, since harmful bacteria can thrive in these areas. Be sure to clean your knife with hot water and soap before using it again.
- Wash FF&V's thoroughly under fresh, cool, running water, even if you plan to peel them. This helps prevent the spread of any bacteria that may be present. (This is a general safety tip that may not always apply. For example, you do not need to wash a banana before peeling it.)
- Use a clean produce brush to scrub items that have firm surfaces (e.g., oranges, melons, potatoes, carrots, etc.). It is not necessary to use produce cleansers to wash FF&V's.
- Ready-to-eat, bagged, pre-washed leafy greens do not need to be washed again before eating. However, pre-cut or pre-washed leafy greens sold in open bags or containers should be washed before eating.
- Use one cutting board for produce, and a separate one for raw meat, poultry, fish and seafood.
- Place peeled or cut FF&V's on/into a separate clean plate or container to prevent them from becoming cross-contaminated.
- Use paper towels to wipe kitchen surfaces, or change dishcloths daily to avoid the risk of cross-contamination and the spread of bacteria and avoid using sponges, as they are harder to keep bacteria-free.
- Sanitize countertops, cutting boards and utensils before and after preparing food. Use a kitchen sanitizer (following the directions on the container) or a bleach solution (5 ml household bleach to 750 ml of water), and rinse with water.

10. Are imported FF&V's safe to eat?

Yes. Imported food does not carry a greater risk for transmission of the virus than domestic product.

11. I'm worried Canada will run out of FF&V's. Should I be?

Canadians can be confident that the food supply will remain safe, secure and stable. The following can be found on the Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (AAFC) website:

- Our food system in Canada is safe and stable.
- We produce healthy food in abundance, and our farmers and processors are some of the most productive in the world.
- Canadians should have confidence that our food supply is able to respond to demands and our distribution system will continue to operate and meet the needs of Canadians.
- The Prime Minister has confirmed that international commerce, trade and supply lines will continue.
- We have plenty of food that will continue to reach grocery stores on a regular basis.

If you receive a FF&V question you require further help with, please forward to:

Jeff Hall
 Food Safety Specialist
jhall@cpma.ca
 647 409-3570

(Please do not share this contact info with consumers.)