



FOOD SAFETY UPDATE

Is Bagged Lettuce Safe?

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Services

Bagged lettuce has become a popular convenience for busy cooks. A few years ago the options were slim—a bag of iceberg with a few shreds of carrot. Now you can find everything from spring mix to fresh baby greens. But with E. Coli outbreaks in bagged spinach and leaf lettuce, many people are now asking, "Is it safer to buy a head of lettuce?"



The Centers For Disease Control (CDC) states that the

evidence does not suggest that washing lettuce at home is any safer than buying the pre-washed varieties. In fact, it may be less safe. This is probably true because the ready-to-eat vegetables are washed multiple times in chlorinated water to aid in killing pathogens. This is usually more thorough than the quick rinse most people give fresh produce at home. Also, cross contamination during food preparation is also a factor in home kitchens.

Recommendations Regarding Washing Ready-to-Eat Lettuce/Leafy Green Salads

Carefully read labels to determine whether a product is one that should be washed before consumption or is it a ready-to-eat (RTE) food product. If the product is **not** labeled "washed", "triple washed" or "ready-to-eat", the product needs to be washed before it is eaten.

If a RTE lettuce/leafy green salad is received in either a sealed bag or rigid plastic container labeled "washed", "triple washed" or "ready-to-eat" it does not need additional washing before you eat it unless specifically directed on

the label. Additional washing treatments are not likely to enhance the safety of RTE lettuce/leafy green salads.

- Harmful bacteria are rarely found on RTE lettuce/leafy green salads.
- In the event that harmful bacteria are present on a RTE lettuce/leafy green salads after commercial washing, they are likely to resist removal or inactivation by further washing.

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Washing RTE Lettuce/Leafy Green Salads

If you choose to wash the RTE lettuce/leafy green salads before use, you should:

- Wash your hands thoroughly with soap and warm water for at least 20 seconds before handling RTE lettuce/leafy green salads. Rewash hands as necessary.
- Clean with hot soapy water: the sink, colander, salad spinner, and any utensils that will come in contact with the salad.



- Use cold running water to wash RTE lettuce/leafy green salads to reduce the potential for cross contamination.
- Dry RTE lettuce/leafy green salads with a clean salad spinner or paper towel not previously used for another purpose.
- Never use detergent or bleach to wash fresh vegetables. These products are not intended for consumption.

Procedures to Protect RTE Greens from Contamination

Check

- Check to ensure that RTE lettuce/leafy green salads you buy are not bruised or damaged.
- Check that RTE lettuce/leafy green salads are refrigerated at the store before buying. Do not buy RTE lettuce/leafy green salads that are not refrigerated.

Clean

- Wash hands with warm water and soap for at least 20 seconds before handling RTE lettuce/leafy green salads.
- Use hot water and soap to clean all surfaces and utensils, including counter tops and salad spinners that will touch RTE lettuce/leafy green salads.
- Use a clean utensil to serve RTE lettuce/leafy green salads.



foods such as meat, poultry and seafood in your cart and in bags at checkout.

- Keep RTE lettuce/leafy green salads separate and protect from contact with raw meat, poultry or seafood or their juices in your refrigerator. Do not allow raw meat, poultry or seafood or their juices in your refrigerator. Do not allow raw meat, poultry or seafood juices to drip onto RTE lettuce/leafy green salads.

Chill

- Store RTE lettuce/leafy green salads in the refrigerator.

Throw Away

- Throw away RTE lettuce/leafy green salads if it has touched raw meat, poultry or seafood.
- Discard the product if it appears spoiled or has exceeded its labeled use-by date.

Separate

- When shopping, be sure fresh produce is separated from household chemicals and raw

For more information on food safety in the kitchen , go to <http://www.fightbac.org/>.