



FOOD SAFETY UPDATE

Risk in Reusing Water Bottles

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Outreach and Extension

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Everywhere you go you see people carrying water bottles. Could all these plastic bottles be good for the environment? In an effort to save money and do a good deed for the environment, many people are reusing their water bottles. But is this practice safe?

Dangerous bacteria and potentially toxic plastic compounds have been found in the types of water bottles that are typically reused in homes, classrooms and workplaces across the county.

A study of water bottles at a Canadian elementary school found bacteria in children's bottles that would have prompted health officials to issue boil-water advisories, had the samples come from a tap.

Researcher Cathy Ryan, a University of Calgary professor, discovered bacterial contamination in about a third of the samples collected from kids' water bottles at the school. Some samples even showed evidence of fecal coliforms. The bacteria likely came from the

kids' hands and mouths over time as they repeatedly used the same bottles without washing them or allowing them to dry.

Though researchers in this study collected samples from only 76 bottles at the elementary school, Professor Ryan said the results would likely be the same anywhere else.



Washing the water bottles would appear to be the solution. However, repeatedly washing water bottles, poses another health risk. A study conducted in the U.S. suggests the kind of thorough washing that would kill bacteria might make the bottles unsafe in another way. Washing the bottles often would accelerate the breakdown of the plastic, potentially causing chemicals to leach into the water.

Although plastics experts contend the bottles are safe, the study concluded little is known about what happens when the bottles are used over and over again.

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Risk in Reusing Water Bottles *(continued)*

Single-use soft-drink and water bottles are commonly made of a plastic called polyethylene terephthalate (PET) which, while considered safe for its intended use, was found to break down over time. A University of Idaho professor said, "The longer you used a bottle, the more stuff ends up in the water.

One of the toxins that frequently appeared in water samples from the reused bottles was DEHA, a carcinogen regulated in drinking water because it has been linked to weight loss, liver problems, or possible reproductive difficulties. It is also suspected that DEHA can cause cancer in humans.

It has become a regular practice in many elementary schools for children to keep water bottles on their desks. These bottles are refilled during the week and sent home with the children on Fridays.

The Canadian Bottled Water Association advises against reusing the water containers altogether. It says they are made for single use and should be recycled afterward, not reused.

Additional information about bottled and tap water is available from *Environment, Health and Safety* online at <http://www.ehso.com/ehshome/DrWater/drinkingwater.php>.

Source: University of Missouri Outreach and Extension

The Joy of Giving Food Safety

Mailing a Perishable Food Gift

- Make sure the food is frozen solid or refrigerator cold.
- Use an insulated cooler or a heavy corrugated box packed with a frozen gel-pack, or purchase dry ice for keeping food cold.
- Alert the recipient and arrange a mutually-agreeable delivery date.
- Properly label the package "Perishable-Keep Refrigerate" on the outside, and provide a complete mailing address and phone number to ensure proper delivery
- Ship your package by overnight delivery.



workplace. The food could be accidentally left at the office or in the trunk of a car.

Receiving a Perishable Gift

- Open the package upon arrival.
- Make sure the food is still refrigerator cold.
- Immediately refrigerate or freeze the food.

Note: Perishable food must arrive cold to be safe.

If it is not cold, **do not eat it**, and notify the shipper. Remember, it's the shipper's responsibility to deliver perishable foods on time, but it's the customer's responsibility to have someone at home to receive the package.

Note: Don't send food to someone's