



University of California
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Agriculture and Natural Resources



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FOOD SAFETY AND MELONS

Following a recent outbreak of Salmonella foodborne disease associated with eating cantaloupe in California and seven other states, the California Department of Health Services is reminding consumers to always thoroughly wash the skin of all fruits and vegetables that are eaten raw before consuming them.

Most consumers do not wash melons before they are consumed, probably because the outer skin is not eaten. It is important to know that bacteria can be spread to cut up fruit if you cut through a melon rind that has not been scrubbed with a brush under cool, running water. To further reduce the chance of contamination, consumers should also wash their hands before and after handling the fruit and refrigerate unused cut portions.

Because melons are grown on the ground, their outer skin can become contaminated in the field by human or animal waste, or during distribution through contaminated rind.

An uncommon type of Salmonella, known as Salmonella Poona, caused the recent outbreak in California. Of the 17 illnesses and death of a woman, six of the individuals, including the woman who died were over 60 years of age and five were children under 5 years. The elderly as well as young children are more susceptible to food borne disease because as you become older your stomach acid diminishes. In the case of young children, they haven't developed as much stomach acid. Extra caution regarding safe food handling is important for these age groups, as well as pregnant women and people

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with compromised immune systems.

The symptoms of Salmonella Poona include fever, abdominal cramps and diarrhea. The symptoms generally develop one to three days after eating contaminated food. While most individuals who become ill from Salmonella Poona recover in three to five days without medical intervention, the infection can be life threatening to young children, the elderly and those with compromised immune systems. Consumers should consult their physician if they have these symptoms.

Source: California Department of Health Services news release, no. 37-01, May 15, 2001

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