

Some fruits and vegetables can make you sick. In the United States, an estimated 33 million people are affected by, and some 9000 people die of, food-borne illnesses from produce, meat, or other edibles. And in spite of their reputation for being healthy foods, cases of bacteria-contaminated cantaloupe, green onions, fresh-squeezed orange juice, lettuce, raspberries, and apple juice have been reported. Due to the inherent weakness in parts of the government

food inspection system, toxic foods can make it to our tables. Responsibility for food safety is divided between the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). Williams warns that overlap of duties is common. When it is not clear who is ultimately responsible for standards related to food safety, accountability and control are lost.

Approximately 38% of fruits and 9% of vegetables come from foreign countries. Williams explains that FDA inspectors cannot keep up with the tremendous volume of imports. Only about 3% of food imported each year is sampled and tested. However, the USDA, FDA, and privately-owned companies have taken steps to minimize food contamination by identifying critical points in food processing and are setting up safeguards. The author identifies several interventions for the consumer that can improve food safety. These include tips on safe shopping, storage, preparation, and shelf life. Hand washing is stressed as the most important intervention. Hands should be washed before preparing food, after handling uncooked meat or seafood, and before eating. Williams describes cases of food poisoning which occurred after the first wave of infections when new victims were exposed to disease-producing bacteria carried on someone's hands. The reader is reminded to wash fruit and vegetables carefully under running water while rubbing the surfaces. Williams also points out food storage hazards in the refrigerator, symptoms of food-borne illness, as well as the sources and carriers of six types of bacteria which commonly cause food-borne infection.

Williams, G. 1998. How to protect your family now. *Parenting*, April: 98-105.

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