

Food Safety Fact Sheet

Preparing, Storing, and Serving Fresh Tomatoes

INTRODUCTION

Tomatoes are a popular component of many menus served in child nutrition programs. When consumed raw, specific care must be taken to handle and store tomatoes properly during all steps of food production. Food safety procedures for handling tomatoes have been updated in the last few years. It is important to follow these new procedures when preparing, storing, and serving fresh tomatoes to keep them safe and protect your customers from foodborne illness.

HERE ARE THE FACTS

Raw tomatoes that are not going to be cooked before they are consumed are considered ready-to-eat foods. It is important to ensure that fresh tomatoes are safe when received and are stored according to Standard Operating Procedures.

When preparing fresh tomatoes, proper hygiene and sanitation must be followed to prevent the transfer of bacteria or viruses to the tomatoes. Child nutrition employees can minimize food safety risks associated with fresh tomatoes by following proper procedures.

APPLICATION

- Only purchase tomatoes from licensed, reputable suppliers.
- Fresh tomatoes that are purchased already cut, sliced, or diced, should be received and stored at 41 °F or below.
- Tomatoes should be largely free of damage, soil, and bruised spots upon receipt.
- Wash fresh tomatoes just before preparation, not before storage.
- Store tomatoes at least 6 inches above the floor, including in walk-in refrigerators.
- Store tomatoes in a covered container and above other items that might contaminate them.

Preparing Fresh Tomatoes

- Ill employees should not prepare food.
- Avoid bare hand contact. Use proper handwashing procedures and use gloves correctly.
- Clean and sanitize work surfaces. Use only dry, cleaned, sanitized equipment and utensils.
- Inspect tomatoes for obvious signs of soil or damage prior to cutting, slicing, or dicing. When in doubt about damaged tomatoes, either cut away the affected areas or do not use the item.
- Wash tomatoes before preparation. The wash water should be at least 10 °F warmer than the inside of the tomato. Do not soak tomatoes or store them in standing water.





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How to Store Cut or Diced Fresh Tomatoes

- Place cut tomatoes in a covered container. Do not store the tomatoes in direct contact with ice or water.
- Label and date the container. Use or discard cut tomatoes within 7 days.
- Store cut tomatoes away from raw animal foods such as eggs, fish, meat, and poultry.
- Separate cut tomatoes from washed fruits and vegetables and other ready-to-eat foods.

How to Serve Cut or Diced Fresh Tomatoes

- Do not hold cut tomatoes in contact with ice or water. Hold at 41 °F or colder.
- Display cut tomatoes for a maximum of 4 hours if not in a refrigeration unit or containers surrounded by ice. Discard any uneaten produce at the end of 4 hours.
- Follow appropriate procedures to avoid cross-contamination on salad bars or self-service bars.

Remember, follow state or local health department requirements.

References

- United Fresh Produce Association. (2008). *Commodity specific food safety guidelines for the fresh tomato supply chain*. Retrieved from <http://www.fda.gov/downloads/Food/GuidanceRegulation/UCM171708.pdf>
- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Food and Drug Administration. (2009). *FDA issues draft guidances for tomatoes, leafy greens and melons*. Retrieved from <http://www.fda.gov/Food/GuidanceRegulation/GuidanceDocumentsRegulatoryInformation/ProducePlantProducts/ucm174086.htm>
- U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, & Institute of Child Nutrition. (2015). *Food safety in schools*. University, MS. Author.

This project has been funded at least in part with Federal funds from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service through an agreement with Institute of Child Nutrition at The University of Mississippi. The contents of this publication do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. government.

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Suggested Reference Citation:
Institute of Child Nutrition. (2016). *Preparing, storing, and serving fresh tomatoes*. University, MS. Author.

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