

Pesticides and Food

What you
and your family
need to know



EPA

United States Environmental Protection Agency
Office of Pesticide Programs (EPA-735-F-98-001)

In consultation with
U.S. Food and Drug Administration
U.S. Department of Agriculture

Pesticides are used to protect food from pests, such as insects, rodents, weeds, mold, and bacteria. While pesticides have important uses, studies show that some pesticides cause health problems at certain levels of exposure. To protect your health, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) sets standards on the amount of pesticides that may remain on food, if pesticides are applied.

The Food Quality Protection Act, signed into law by President Clinton in 1996, now sets a tougher standard for pesticide use on food. EPA will consider the public's overall exposure to pesticides (through food, water, and in home environments) when making decisions to set standards for pesticide use on food.

Infants and children may be more vulnerable to pesticide exposure

Most importantly, each of these decisions must protect infants and children, whose developing bodies may be especially vulnerable to pesticide exposure:

- ▶ Since their internal organs are still developing and maturing, infants and children may be more vulnerable to health risks posed by pesticides.
- ▶ In relation to their body weight, infants and children eat and drink more than adults, which may increase their exposure to pesticides in food and water.
- ▶ Certain behaviors—such as playing on floors or lawns or putting objects in their mouths—increase a child's exposure to pesticides used in homes and yards.

By 2006, EPA must review all old pesticides to make sure that their use on food meets the new, tougher safety standard. At the same time, the federal government is encouraging the innovation of safer pesticides that are less likely to cause health problems.

You and your family have a right to know under the law that in certain cases, such as significant disruption of U.S. food production, a pesticide not meeting the safety standard may be authorized. If this happens, EPA will work with grocery stores to inform you of such pesticides, foods that might contain them, and equally nutritious alternatives.

Healthy, Sensible Food Practices



WASHING: Wash and scrub all fresh fruits and vegetables thoroughly under running water. Running water has an abrasive effect that soaking does not have. This will help remove bacteria and traces of chemicals from the surface of fruits and vegetables and dirt from crevices. Not all pesticide residues can be removed by washing.

PEELING AND TRIMMING:

Peel fruits and vegetables when possible to reduce dirt, bacteria, and pesticides. Discard outer leaves of leafy vegetables. Trim fat from meat and skin from poultry and fish because some pesticide residues collect in fat.



SELECTING A VARIETY OF

FOODS: Eat a variety of foods, from a variety of sources. This will give you a better mix of nutrients and reduce your likelihood of exposure to a single pesticide.

Health professionals recommend that you eat at least five servings of fruits and vegetables every day along with a variety of other foods.

What about organic or IPM-grown food?

Your grocer may be able to provide you with information about the availability of food grown using fewer or no pesticides. These foods are often grown using *Integrated Pest Management* (IPM) or *organic* practices; however, there are currently no national standards on these farming practices.

How can I find more information?

Visit www.epa.gov/pesticides/food

EPA's Pesticide Right-to-Know Website has information on:

How the government regulates pesticides

What the pesticide residue limits are on food

Why children may be especially sensitive to pesticides

What *Integrated Pest Management* means

What organically grown means

You may also contact:

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
Office of Pesticide Programs
Communication Services Branch (7506C)
401 M Street, SW
Washington, DC 20460

National Pesticide Telecommunications Network
(general pesticide information) (800) 858-7378

U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave., SW
Washington, DC 20250
Meat and Poultry Hotline (800) 535-4555
USDA National Organic Program (202) 720-3252
www.usda.gov

U.S. Food and Drug Administration
5600 Fishers Lane
Rockville, MD 20857
FDA Food Information Line (800) 332-4010
www.cfsan.fda.gov

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