

PENNY SAVER NEWS

FAX: 932-5261

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BY: Mary A. Keith, Ph.D., L.D.
Food, Nutrition and Health Agent**HILLSBOROUGH COUNTY**

5339 S. County Road 579

Seffner, FL 33584-3334

PH:(813)744-5519 x 136, FAX:744-5776
e-mail:mkeith@ufl.edu**Cantaloupes in Your Kitchen**

With all the bad news about cantaloupes on the morning, afternoon and evening news these days, you might not want to be handling any cantaloupe! So far at least 72 people have gotten sick. They're from 18 different states, including one here in Florida. Unfortunately 13 people have died. The FDA and CDC are pretty sure they know where the contaminated cantaloupes are from, and think that they and the farms that grew them have gotten all the contaminated ones off the market. But this outbreak is not over because people could still be getting sick for months to come.

The bacteria that's causing all these problems is *Listeria*. It's a strange bug that does some very nasty things. For one thing, if you eat food contaminated with *Listeria* today you might not get sick for a couple of months. That's because it causes an infection, and it could take that long for it to grow to enough to make you sick. How many bacteria each person needs to get sick depends on their body size, age and other overall health factors. Women who are pregnant have a very high risk that they'll lose the baby or have a baby with major defects. Older persons and those with poor or no immunity are also at very high risk of death or serious illness. But a healthy adult might only feel like they have a case of mild flu.

Another unusual thing about *Listeria* that is making this outbreak even worse is that it can grow in the refrigerator. If your refrigerator is set to 38-39°F other food poisoning bacteria won't grow. It's too cold for them. But *Listeria* will grow. Most cases of *Listeria* poisoning are tracked back to luncheon meat, hot dogs, soft cheese, even

sometimes deli salads and coleslaw. Those are the kinds of things we tend to keep in the refrigerator for longer times, thinking that they're safe. But if they are contaminated with *Listeria*, they are not. Even if a contaminated cantaloupe is refrigerated, the bacteria can keep growing.

All melons, because they grow on the ground, could potentially be contaminated with *Listeria*. Cantaloupes have an extra problem, that rough skin. It's much harder to wash a cantaloupe and get all the bacteria off the skin. Once the skin is cut, then any bacteria there will get spread across the insides too. They'll find lots of sweet juice, just the stuff to keep them growing. So be sure to keep all cut fruit and fruit salads cold!

Another thing that we all can do is keep our refrigerators clean. Start by washing your hands in warm soapy water, rinsing and drying them. Take everything out of the refrigerator. Wash the walls and shelves with warm soapy water then rinse them with clean water. Add a tablespoon of bleach to a gallon of warm water. Wipe the whole inside of the refrigerator with this mixture. Wipe it all dry with clean paper or cloth towels. Let it finish drying, then put the food back in. Wash your hands again.

Anytime there's a spill, drip or leak in the refrigerator clean it up quickly. Wash, rinse and sanitize the shelf in the same way. A few drips of juice can be plenty of food for *Listeria* to grow in. And try to wash the refrigerator regularly, not just when it gets too dirty to stand!

Because *Listeria* is often found in lunch meats and hot dogs, always be sure to heat until steamy before any small children, elderly, pregnant women or people with low immune systems eat them. Although *Listeria* will grow in the cold, they don't like the heat. Cooking will kill them easily. And do not keep them more than 1 week. If you

can't eat a whole package in a week, freeze half of it. Thaw out the second half only when you're ready to use it. You'll be a lot safer!

Here's a tangy coleslaw that you won't need to worry about. It's kept frozen until you're ready to use it.

Frozen Slaw

1 (3 pound) head of cabbage, shredded, or 3 bags of prepared shredded cabbage

1 tsp salt

2 cups sugar, or equivalent sweetener

1 cup vinegar

1 tsp celery seeds

1 tsp mustard seeds

1 carrot, shredded

1 bell pepper, red or green, minced

Toss cabbage with salt in a large bowl and let stand in refrigerator for 1 hour. Squeeze cabbage to remove juice. Mix vinegar, sugar and seeds in small saucepan and bring to boil. Boil for 1 minute. Remove from heat and let stand until cool. Pour cool seasoned vinegar over squeezed cabbage. Mix well, then pack in containers or bags for freezing. Keep frozen until ready to use. Put in refrigerator several hours before use. When thawed enough to stir, add in carrots and pepper. Serves 8.