

Communication 055/2026

2 October 2026

Pre-cut fruit and vegetables may contain pathogens

Fruit, vegetables and products made from them must be stored in a cool place and consumed quickly

Pre-cut fruit and vegetables, known as ‘fresh-cut’ or ‘ready-to-eat’ products, have become a staple of supermarket ranges. In the catering, canteens, bakeries and households, pre-cut raw fruit and vegetable products are purchased to reduce the need of peeling and cutting them.

Fruit and vegetables can become contaminated with pathogenic bacteria during cultivation, transport and storage if hygiene standards are inadequate. In fresh-cut products, microbiological contaminations can multiply easily, leading to these products being highly perishable. Consuming such contaminated products poses a risk of illness. This applies in particular to vulnerable population groups, such as children, pregnant women and people whose immune systems are weakened due to advanced age, pre-existing medical conditions or medication.

High-risk groups should either avoid fresh-cut fruit and vegetables or prepare meals using fresh, thoroughly washed ingredients only shortly before consumption. In addition, the manufacturer’s instructions regarding the use-by date and refrigeration of fresh-cut products should be followed.

Pre-cut leafy salads, raw vegetables, fresh herbs and sprouts are frequently consumed by many people in Germany. Intact lettuce and cabbage leaves offer a certain degree of natural protection against germs. This natural protection is destroyed as soon as the leaves are cut, as cell sap seeps out from the cut surfaces, providing an ideal environment for germs to thrive. Furthermore, the high humidity inside the plastic packaging promotes the growth of microorganisms.

Pre-sliced melons are also popular; these are sold ready to eat, sometimes mixed with other types of fruit. Micro-organisms can easily adhere to the rough surface of 'netted melons', such as the Cantaloupe variety, in particular. If pathogenic bacteria come into contact with the low-acid flesh, they can multiply within just a few hours if the fruit is stored at room temperature and may, under certain circumstances, pose a health risk. In isolated cases, the consumption of melons has led to disease outbreaks caused by *Salmonella*, *Listeria* and enterohaemorrhagic *Escherichia coli* (EHEC).

Contamination of these foods can occur as early as the growth or harvesting stage, for example through irrigation with contaminated water or the use of organic fertilisers. To ensure the microbiological safety of fresh-cut products, drinking water must be used during processing. On the other hand, by washing the products the bacterial load is also reduced.

Poor hygiene during the production and processing stages, such as contaminated washing water or inadequate cooling, can promote bacterial growth in sprouts and mixed salads.

To minimise the risk of foodborne infection, following should be observed:

- The BfR advises consumers to eat pre-cut fruit, such as melons, quickly or to keep it refrigerated at all times, preferably at +4–6 °C, to minimise bacterial growth.
- Chopped fresh leafy produce should, where possible, be stored at a maximum of +7 °C and consumed quickly.
- Even if the products are advertised as 'ready-to-eat', salad should still be rinsed thoroughly with cold water before eating to reduce the bacterial load.
- When shopping, it should be ensured that pre-chopped fruit is visually flawless, fresh and sufficiently chilled.
- Swollen packaging indicates gas build-up due to fermentation. Significant discolouration or excessive liquid accumulation in the packaging are signs of a lack of freshness. In such cases, the produce should not be consumed.
- Pregnant women and people whose immune systems are weakened by old age, pre-existing medical conditions or medication should, as a precaution, avoid pre-cut and pre-packaged salads, as well as pre-cut fruit such as melons. Instead, fruit and salads can be prepared at home from fresh, thoroughly washed ingredients, prior to eating.

These recommendations apply to food preparation in food retail outlets and private households, as well as in communal catering facilities and the hospitality industry.

Further information on the BfR website regarding food hygiene

BfR opinion: Grass and leaf products for consumption may be contaminated with human pathogen bacteria

<https://www.bfr.bund.de/en/opinions/grass-and-leaf-products-for-consumption-may-be-contaminated-with-human-pathogen-bacteria/>

BfR opinion: Resistente Keime: Rohkost und Salat gut waschen und frisch selbst zubereiten (in german only)

<https://www.bfr.bund.de/stellungnahme/resistente-keime-rohkost-und-salat-gut-waschen-und-frisch-selbst-zubereiten/>

Joint press release from the BfR and JKI

Resistant bacteria: can raw vegetables and salad pose a health risk?

<https://www.bfr.bund.de/en/press-release/resistant-bacteria-can-raw-vegetables-and-salad-pose-a-health-risk/>

BfR Consumer advice: Protection against foodborne infections in private households

<https://www.bfr.bund.de/en/publication/consumer-advice-protection-against-foodborne-infections-in-private-households/>

Assessment of microbial risks in food

<https://www.bfr.bund.de/en/food-safety/assessment-of-microbial-risks-in-foods/>

About the BfR

The German Federal Institute for Risk Assessment (BfR) is a scientifically independent body operating under the remit of the Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Home Affairs (BMLEH). It works to protect public health through preventive measures in the fields of public health and veterinary public health. The BfR advises the Federal Government and the German federal states on matters relating to food and feed safety, chemical safety and product safety. The BfR conducts its own research on topics closely related to its assessment tasks.

Legal notice

Publisher:

Federal Institute for Risk Assessment

Max-Dohrn-Straße 8–10

10589 Berlin

T +49 30 18412-0

F +49 30 18412-99099

bfr@bfr.bund.de

bfr.bund.de

Public-law institution

Represented by the President, Professor Dr Dr Dr h.c. Andreas Hensel

Supervisory authority: Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Home Affairs

VAT No.: DE 165 893 448

Responsible under press law: Dr Suzan Fiack



Applies to texts produced by the BfR

Images, photographs and graphics are excluded unless otherwise labelled

BfR | Risiken erkennen –
Gesundheit schützen