INTRODUCTION

Vegetables and fruits are an important part of our diet and are commonly consumed raw as salads, garnishes, cut fruits or fruit juice. Hence, it is important to handle raw vegetables and fruits safely to prevent contamination. Contamination can occur through agriculture, harvesting and post-harvest handling, such as sorting and storage. Eating contaminated raw vegetables and fruits, including their juices, can lead to foodborne illness.

Food handlers in food retail outlets play an important role to provide safe food to the public. The following safe practices should be observed when handling raw vegetables and fruits to minimise contamination.

GUIDELINES

1) Purchase
   a) Purchase vegetables and fruits from reliable sources licensed by the Singapore Food Agency (SFA).
   b) Reject vegetables and fruits that are bruised, damaged, mouldy or show signs of damage by pests. If good quality vegetables and fruits are not available, use other alternatives such as canned or frozen vegetables and fruits.

2) Safe Storage
   a) Refrigerate raw vegetables and fruits below 5°C.

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b) Refrigerate cut vegetables and fruits below 5°C within two hours of peeling or cutting to maintain quality and safety. Leftover cut produce should be discarded if left at room temperature for more than 2 hours.

c) Store vegetables and fruits above raw meats, fish and poultry separately on different shelves or compartments to avoid cross-contamination.

d) Keep vegetables and fruits in separate storage compartments as fruits can cause green vegetables to turn yellow during the ripening process.

3) Safe Preparation and Serving

a) Wash hands with soap and water before and after handling fresh produce. Do not handle or prepare any food when you are ill and exhibit symptoms such as vomiting and/or diarrhoea.

b) Wash chopping boards, dishes, utensils and table tops with soap and water before and after the preparation of vegetables and fruits.

c) Remove the base of vegetables containing soil and wash vegetables with clean water to ensure they are free of any soil. For leafy vegetables such as lettuce and cabbage, remove and discard the outer leaves.

d) Cut away any bruised or damaged areas of vegetables and fruits. Discard rotten vegetables and fruits.

e) Wash vegetables and fruits thoroughly under running water just before eating, cutting or cooking to remove dirt, bacteria and chemical residues.

f) Soak vegetables in fresh tap water for 15 minutes. Special detergent or washing liquid is not required. Before cutting or cooking, rinse the vegetables once more under running water.

g) Scrub vegetables and fruits with hard surfaces (such as cucumbers, potatoes, carrots & rock melons) with a clean brush under running tap water. Peel fruits and vegetables to remove dirt and bacteria.

h) Use designated clean and dry chopping boards and utensils to prepare raw vegetables and fruits.
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