



**DELAWARE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE**  
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To: Newsroom Directors and Assignment Editors

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**Concerned about sprouts? Food Safety.gov answers frequently asked questions.**  
<http://www.foodsafety.gov/keep/types/fruits/sprouts.html>

In response to consumer questions about sprouts and food safety due to the on-going problem in Germany, the Delaware Division of Public Health (DPH) and the Delaware Department of Agriculture (DDA) say that there are no reports of foodborne illness associated with sprouts in Delaware at this time. However, DDA and DPH recommend that consumers heed the following information from *foodsafety.gov* about sprouts:

**Sprouts: What You Should Know**

**Do sprouts carry a risk of illness?** Like any fresh produce that is consumed raw or lightly cooked, sprouts carry a risk of foodborne illness. Unlike other fresh produce, seeds and beans need warm and humid conditions to sprout and grow. These conditions are also ideal for the growth of bacteria, including *Salmonella*, *Listeria*, and *E. coli*.

**Have sprouts been associated with outbreaks of foodborne illness?** Since 1996, there have been at least 30 reported outbreaks of foodborne illness associated with different types of raw and lightly cooked sprouts. Most of these outbreaks were caused by *Salmonella* and *E. coli*.

**What is the source of the bacteria?** In outbreaks associated with sprouts, the seed is typically the source of the bacteria. There are a number of approved techniques to kill harmful bacteria that may be present on seeds and even tests for seeds during sprouting. But, no treatment is guaranteed to eliminate all harmful bacteria.

**Are homegrown sprouts safer?** Not necessarily. If just a few harmful bacteria are present in or on the seed, the bacteria can grow to high levels during sprouting, even under sanitary conditions at home.

**What can industry do to enhance the safety of sprouts?** In 1999, the FDA provided the sprout industry with guidance on reducing the risk of contamination of sprouts by harmful bacteria. The FDA and other Federal and state agencies continue to work with industry on detecting and reducing contamination and keeping contaminated sprouts out of the marketplace.

**What can consumers do to reduce the risk of illness?**

- Children, the elderly, pregnant women, and persons with weakened immune systems should avoid eating raw sprouts of any kind (including alfalfa, clover, radish, and mung bean sprouts).

- Cook sprouts thoroughly to reduce the risk of illness. Cooking kills the harmful bacteria.
- Request that raw sprouts not be added to your food. If you purchase a sandwich or salad at a restaurant or delicatessen, check to make sure that raw sprouts have not been added.

### **General Information**

Safe Eats: Fruits, Veggies, and Juices (FDA)

Guidelines for safe eating during pregnancy include warnings about sprouts.

### **Background on Previous Outbreaks**

Raw Alfalfa Spouts Linked to *Salmonella* Contamination (FDA)

FDA recommendations to consumers in response to the Spring 2009 outbreak.

Investigation of an Outbreak of *Salmonella* Saintpaul Infections Linked to Raw Alfalfa Sprouts  
(CDC)

Includes a map showing the number of cases by state in the Spring 2009 outbreak.

Anyone who has concerns about symptoms after consuming sprouts can contact the Division of Public Health's Bureau of Epidemiology at 888-295-5156 or 303-744-1033.

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