

## Listeria 101: Super Safe Your Kitchen

*Listeria monocytogenes* can be deadly to older adults and consumers with weakened immune systems, and can cause miscarriage in pregnant women or severe illness in newborns. In addition to being an especially virulent pathogen, *Listeria* is able to survive and grow even at cold refrigerator temperatures. To protect yourself when preparing produce and to sanitize your kitchen, utensils and supplies, follow the tips below and check <http://www.FDA.gov> for additional information on *Listeria* and recalls.

### Cleaning Fruits and Vegetables

Prior to peeling, cutting, or eating, CSPI recommends washing fruits and vegetables under clean running water (but no dish soap). Melons, in particular, should be scrubbed with a clean vegetable brush and left to air dry before preparing. You should wash your hands with warm water and soap *before* and *after* handling melons, including cantaloupe, watermelon, or honeydew. ***If you suspect you have a recalled melon or other recalled produce item in your kitchen, do NOT wash it—just discard it (and then sanitize any surfaces it may have touched, as described below).***

### Cleaning and Sanitizing Hard Surfaces

Chlorine bleach works well to kill bacteria on hard surfaces. For bleach to function properly, however, the surface or item must first be clean. After thoroughly washing food preparation surfaces with hot, soapy water, you can sanitize them with a solution of diluted bleach. This diluted bleach solution should be prepared by mixing 1 teaspoon of unscented chlorine bleach in one quart of water. (You may also check stores for disinfecting cleaners that contain bleach. Use as directed). Let the solution stand on the surfaces for a few minutes, then allow it to air dry or pat dry with fresh paper towels. Be sure to sanitize your vegetable brush and sink drain too (but do not use this bleach solution on food).

### Cleaning and Sanitizing Cutting Boards and Utensils

Cutting boards should be washed with hot, soapy water or placed in the dishwasher. You can also sanitize cutting boards with the diluted bleach solution (see preparation instructions above). You should routinely discard and replace any cutting boards that become excessively worn or develop hard-to-clean grooves. A dishwasher must have water temperature high enough—about 140°F—to activate the ingredients in the dishwashing detergent to sanitize dishes and utensils. Your dishwasher's instruction manual can help you check the operating temperature. In addition, the dishwashing detergent should include chlorine bleach as an ingredient.

### Sanitizing Reusable Grocery Bags, Sponges, Dish Cloths, and Towels

Since sponges are great places for bacteria to grow, they too must be sanitized. You can sanitize sponges, vegetable brushes and other hard-to-clean utensils in the dishwasher, or by placing non-metal items and damp sponges in the microwave. Contaminated dish cloths, towels, and reusable bags should be washed frequently in hot water with chlorine bleach according to product instructions.

**To super safe your kitchen, be sure to clean and sanitize all surfaces that might be contaminated. This includes hard surfaces such as counters, sinks, tables, and refrigerator shelves or bins; utensils such as cutting boards, knives, and dishes; and other surfaces such as placemats, reusable grocery bags, dish cloths, towels, and sponges. Even cupboard knobs and handles should be wiped with sanitizer, as they may have also been contaminated through hand contact.**