

SAFETY ALERT FROM HEALTH CANADA ON REUSABLE GROCERY BAGS*

Health Canada

Food Safety Tips for Reusable Grocery Bags and Bins

Using reusable grocery bags and bins is a good environmental choice for Canadians. In fact, with many grocery stores in Canada promoting the use of reusable grocery bags and bins, more and more Canadians are making the choice to carry reusable grocery bags while shopping. However, it's still important to practice good food safety to avoid the risks of cross-contamination and foodborne illness.

Certain foods, such as raw meat, poultry and fish, can naturally contain bacteria, viruses or parasites that can cause foodborne illness. Other fresh foods, such as fresh produce, may carry bacteria and can also become contaminated as a result of cross-contamination.

While cross-contamination can happen throughout the growing, harvesting or production process, it is important to reduce the chances of cross-contamination between foods while you are shopping. This is particularly the case for fresh foods that you may not cook before eating.

Cross-Contamination

When you are using reusable grocery bags and bins, the biggest concern for food safety is cross-contamination. Because these kinds of grocery bags and bins are used frequently, they can pick up bacteria from foods they carry.

Bacteria can also be transferred from the environment, from places such as the grocery cart, the ground and the car. These reusable bags and bins are often used to carry other items as well. Bacteria can transfer onto foods when you place them into the bags and bins and can cause foodborne illness for your family.

Here are some food safety tips that you can follow to help lower the risk of cross-contamination:

When you are using cloth bags, make sure to wash them frequently, especially after carrying fresh produce, meat, poultry or fish. Some reusable grocery bags may not be machine washable. If you are using this type of grocery bag, you should make sure to wash them by hand frequently with hot soapy water. Plastic bins should be washed using hot soapy water on a regular basis as well.

If you notice that juices from your food have leaked into the bag or bin, make sure you wash them before using them again.

You should put fresh or frozen raw meat, poultry and fish in separate bins or bags from fresh produce and other ready to eat foods.

You can also put your meat, poultry or fish in plastic bags, such as the clear bags you can find in the produce and some meat sections. This will help prevent the juices from leaking out and contaminating your reusable bags and bins and also other foods. Fresh produce should also always be placed in plastic bags to protect them from contamination.

If you are using your grocery bags or bins to store or transport non-food items, they should be thoroughly washed before using them for groceries.

Always follow proper safe food handling and preparation techniques in your kitchen, whether or not you are using reusable grocery bags. The four key steps are: clean, separate, cook and chill.

After putting your groceries away, clean the areas where you placed your bags or bins while unbagging your food, especially the kitchen counter and the kitchen table.