

Care when preparing food stops disease

A food safety expert says consumers need to properly handle and prepare produce before eating, washing both hands and produce, to avoid contamination from cyclospora and other infectious agents.

Although these practices are always important, extra caution should be taken as a result of a recent outbreak of the cyclospora infection. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention have reported more than 353 cases this summer, most likely spread by consuming contaminated produce.

"It is still safe to eat fresh vegetables, as the vegetables that caused the infection are likely no longer being sold," said Londa Vanderwal Nwadike, state extension consumer food safety spe-

cialist with Kansas State University and the University of Missouri.

This outbreak is a great reminder for consumers to use proper food-safety practices when preparing and handling fresh vegetables, whether purchased at a grocery, a farmers market or raised yourself, she said.

Proper food safety handling practices include:

- Thoroughly wash your hands with soap for 20 seconds before and after handling or preparing any food.
- Cut away any damaged or bruised parts of produce.
- Wash or rub down the produce under clean running water, even if you are going to peel it.
- Be sure to use clean water and clean the produce thoroughly.

There is no need to use soap or produce rinses.

• With items such as head lettuce, be sure to take apart the leaves and wash them individually.

• Use a vegetable brush to scrub the outside surface of produce such as potatoes and melons under running water.

With cyclospora, it usually takes a week from the time contaminated food is consumed until the person becomes sick. Symptoms of infection include persistent watery diarrhea with frequent bowel movements, which can last an average of 60 days if not treated. Other common symptoms include loss of appetite, stomach cramps and pain, bloating, increased gas, fatigue and other flu-

like symptoms.

As of July 26, the infections included 140 cases in Iowa, 71 in Nebraska, 92 in Texas, two in Missouri, and one in Kansas. At least 21 people have been admitted to hospital in three states. All these numbers may continue to rise as cases are investigated.

"Even though only two cases have been reported in Missouri and one in Kansas so far," Nwadike said, "there may be some consumers (who) have been exposed to the pathogen. Anyone who is experiencing the symptoms listed above should see their health care provider."

For more, see an Iowa State University video on washing fresh produce at youtu.be/5iQ5P1wQrRU.

Immigrant crosses border in pile of chiles

COLUMBUS, N.M. (AP) – Authorities say an immigrant suspected of entering the country illegally attempted to make his journey in an unusual but hot place – a shipment of red chile.

U.S. Customs and Border Protection officers working at a New Mexico border checkpoint said the man was discovered Thursday face down among a commercial load of the spicy stuff.

Columbus Port Director Robert Reza says next to the "highly intoxicated" 35-year-old was a bottle of tequila.

The man, who authorities described as a Mexican national, told agents that he climbed into the commercial hopper while it was being staged in Mexico. He got into the truck-full of chile in hopes of catching a ride to Chicago, the *El Paso Times* reported.

Agents said he got less than 100 yards into New Mexico before he was discovered. He will be returned to Mexico, officials said.

The red chile shipment was later released.

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