

# Report finds high levels of pesticides in 20% of fruits, veggies

April 18 2024, by Robin Foster

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Nearly 20% of fresh, frozen and canned fruits and vegetables that

Americans eat contain concerning levels of pesticides, a new report finds.

Pesticides posed significant risks in popular choices such as strawberries, green beans, bell peppers, blueberries and potatoes, the [review](#) from Consumer Reports found.

"One food in particular, green beans, had residues of a pesticide that hasn't been allowed to be used on the vegetable in the U.S. for over a decade," the [report](#) authors said in a news release. "And imported produce, especially some from Mexico, was particularly likely to carry risky levels of pesticide residues."

How likely? Sixty-five of 100 samples of the most contaminated produce were imported, with 52 of those samples originating from Mexico, the review found.

The majority of the highly contaminated produce were strawberries, typically the frozen variety, the report said.

Why? Because they grow low to the ground and are therefore more accessible to bugs, strawberries often top lists of foods contaminated with insecticides, CNN reported.

Meanwhile, nearly all the tested green beans were contaminated with acephate, an insecticide that is considered a "[possible human carcinogen](#) ." The Environmental Protection Agency [prohibited the chemical for use on green beans](#) in 2011.

In response to the report, the Food Industry Association told CNN that "all [pesticides](#) go through an extensive review process by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency [EPA] to ensure they are safe for [human consumption](#) and to establish tolerances, the maximum residue

limit permitted on or in a food."

And the U.S. Food and Drug Administration is responsible "for monitoring and enforcing EPA's tolerances for pesticides in food, including foods imported into the U.S.," Hilary Thesmar, the association's chief science officer and senior vice president of food and product safety, told CNN.

Pesticides have been linked in studies to [preterm births](#) and [neural tube defects](#). Exposure to pesticides has also been associated with [heart disease](#), cancer and other illnesses.

Critics point to the EPA's lack of action as a key reason why pesticides are frequently found on produce, despite a growing amount of evidence that even low levels could be harmful, CNN reported.

"The EPA could certainly be doing a better job of setting more accurate safe limits based on the latest science," Alexis Temkin, senior toxicologist at the Environmental Working Group, told CNN. "Some of these pesticides require immediate, swift action by the EPA to consider these potential health risks more strongly."

Not all the news was bad, according to the report, which analyzed seven years of [testing data](#) from the U.S. Department of Agriculture on 59 common fruits and vegetables.

Pesticide levels were of little concern in nearly two-thirds of the foods included in the review, including nearly all of the organic ones, Consumer Reports said.

What can consumers do to reduce their risk of pesticide exposure?

Cleaning fruits and vegetables before eating does reduce pesticide levels,

but there is "no method of washing produce that is 100% effective for removing all pesticide residues," according to the [National Pesticide Information Center](#).

Starting with [clean hands](#), wash and scrub produce under running water instead of soaking to remove the most pesticide residue, the center recommends.

Don't use soap, detergent or a commercial produce wash, however, as they have not been proven to be any more effective, [FDA](#) says. Dry the produce with a clean cloth or paper towel.

To reduce your risk of exposure even further, switch to organic produce whenever possible, Consumer Reports advised.

**More information:** Visit the Environmental Protection Agency for more on [pesticides in food](#).

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