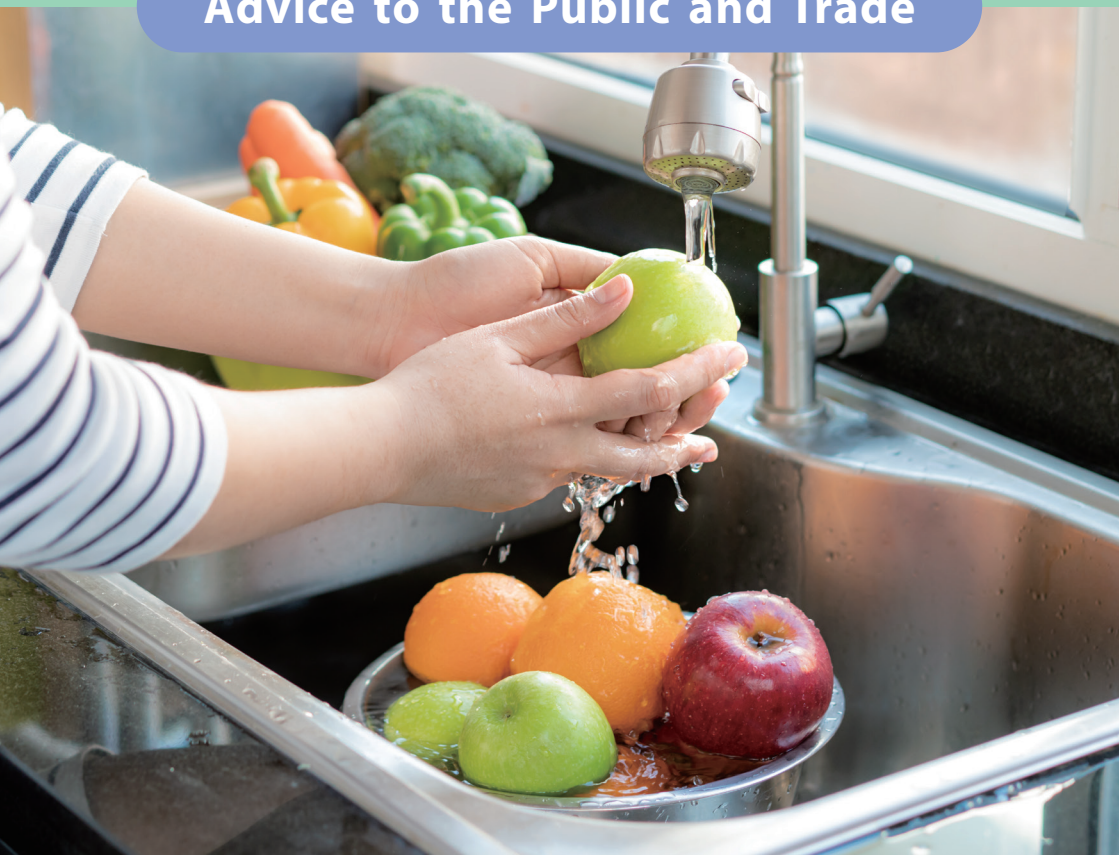


# Proper Handling of Vegetables and Fruits

Advice to the Public and Trade



Vegetables and fruits are essential in a balanced diet. They are good sources of dietary fibres, vitamins and minerals. Vegetables and fruits not only help promoting gastrointestinal health, but also reduce the risk of certain chronic diseases, such as cancers and cardiovascular diseases.

Pesticides are substances used to kill, repel, control or reduce pests. Appropriate use of pesticides can reduce the damage of crops caused by pests and increase crop yields. However, improper use of pesticides can cause consumers ingesting excessive pesticide residues, which may affect their health.

## Pesticide residue present in vegetables and fruits

By their nature, pesticides are potentially toxic to organisms including humans. Therefore, the approval to the use of pesticides is strictly regulated to ensure that pesticides do not cause harm to consumers, environment and the users etc. Nevertheless, small amounts of pesticides may still remain in or on food even when pesticides are applied in the right amount and at the right time.

When farmers use pesticides according to the Good Agricultural Practice (GAP), less residues remain in crops at harvest and do not normally exceed the Maximum Residue Limits (MRLs) established in the place of use and are very unlikely to pose a health risk.



## Interpretation of MRLs

MRLs refer to the maximum concentration of a pesticide residue permitted in a food commodity when the Good Agricultural Practice (GAP) is observed. According to the GAP, one should apply only the minimum amount of approved pesticide necessary to control pest, thereby protecting the health of consumers. The primary aims of setting MRLs for pesticides in food are to safeguard public health and to provide an indicator for the trade.

Foods containing pesticides below MRLs fit for human consumption. However, the MRL should not be regarded as the "safety upper limit" because it is generally much lower than the amount of pesticides that can cause health effects. In other words, even if the pesticide residue occasionally exceeds the limit, it does not necessarily mean that there is an immediate health risk, so there is no cause for undue alarm. An excess in the pesticide residual level reflects an improper use of pesticide or comply with GAP, which requires rectification at the sources.

## Monitoring and control of vegetables and fruits on sale in Hong Kong

The Centre for Food Safety (CFS) of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) operates a food surveillance programme and regularly takes samples of vegetables at import, wholesale and retail levels for testing for the presence of pesticide residue and heavy metals. The CFS will determine whether vegetables contain excessive pesticide residues in accordance with the Pesticide Residues in Food Regulation (Cap. 132CM) (the Regulation).

The Total Diet Studies conducted by the CFS in the past years showed that dietary exposures to the residues of encountered pesticides would be unlikely to pose unacceptable health risks to consumers.

## Advice to the washing of vegetables and fruits

In order to remove the pesticides remaining in the fruits and vegetables effectively while retaining the nutritional value of the fruits and vegetables, the following procedures can be used to clean the fruits and vegetables:

- Wash vegetables and fruits thoroughly under clean running water.
- When appropriate, scrub produce with hard surfaces (e.g. melon and pumpkin) with a clean produce brush to remove dirt and substances including pesticides and contaminants from the surface and the fissures.
- Use of soaps, formula detergents, soda powder or produce washes is not recommended.



## Advice to the importers and traders of vegetables and fruits

1. For importers and traders engaged in the import and sale of vegetables supplied from the Mainland, they should import vegetables from farms and processing establishments registered with the Mainland authority, General Administration of Customs of the People's Republic of China.
2. The trade should ensure that the foods they sell or import are fit for human consumption and comply with legal standards.
3. Farmers should follow Good Agricultural Practice (GAP) during the use of pesticide, which include:
  - Apply approved pesticides that are properly labelled and packaged.
  - Apply minimum quantities necessary to achieve adequate control.
  - Strictly adhere to the withholding period or pre-harvest interval specified on the label of the pesticide to avoid causing harvested crops to contain MRLs.
4. For more information regarding the list of permitted pesticides in Hong Kong as well as the safe use of agricultural pesticides, please visit the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department's Website at: [http://www.afcd.gov.hk/english/quarantine/qua\\_pesticide/qua\\_pesticide.html](http://www.afcd.gov.hk/english/quarantine/qua_pesticide/qua_pesticide.html)



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