

Fruit for thought: Pesticides rule your table, 30 times over

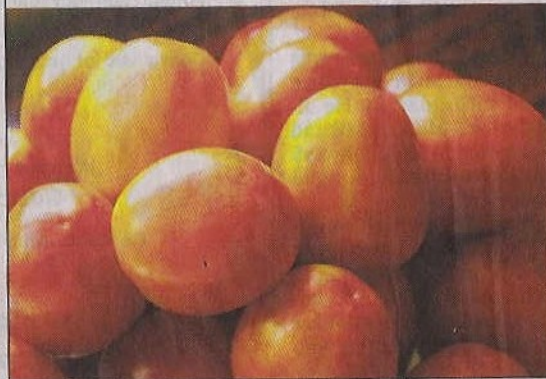
Times News Network

New Delhi: Next time you bite into an apple or slice a tomato for your salad, just be careful. You could be using a pesticide-laden fruit unfit for human consumption. Preliminary studies conducted by Delhi's first State Grading Laboratory show that fruits and vegetables in capital's markets contain pesticides more than the prescribed limit.

The levels are 20-30 times the prescribed limits. The laboratory, the first of its kind in the capital, has been checking fruits and vegetables for pesticide residues, metal contamination, mycotoxins and microbial contamination. The experiments have thrown up appalling results. Sample this: tomatoes in Delhi need to be washed twice under running water and then scrubbed clean with a dry cloth before they can be used for consumption. The reason is what can't be seen with naked eye — fungal spores.

These spores are embedded in the skin of a tomato and washing them is not enough. Even if they are perfectly red without

Chemical overload



Investigations by State Grading Laboratory under Delhi government's directorate of agricultural marketing have revealed startling facts

- All fruits and vegetables in Delhi's markets have 20-30 times the prescribed pesticide levels
- 73% of samples had very high lead content
- Mangoes had very high pesticide levels on the skin, slightly higher than prescribed limits on interface of skin and pulp and within limit in pulp
- Tomatoes have fungal spores and they need to be washed twice and then rubbed with a clean cloth before they can be used
- Even banned pesticides like DDT and BHC are present in most vegetables

What can happen to you

Tumour

Cancer

Neurological disorder

Liver problems

Kidney stones

Stomach ailments

any marks on the surface, tomatoes could have spores. If one consumes tomatoes without washing them properly, these spores keep getting deposited in the body and cause stomach ailments.

Dr R K Gupta, consultant at the laboratory, said: There is still hope. We can educate people to wash vegetables or treat them in a particular manner to reduce pesticide levels or other contaminants." At present, the laboratory is operating in research and development (R&D) mode. Though testing of one sample costs Rs 7,000, it is conducting these tests free of cost for people. P K Chakraborty, marketing officer in directorate of agricultural marketing, said: "We are also trying for backward linkages. This means that we will try to link highly contaminated vegetables and fruits back to the farmer. This way we would be able to tell them how to reduce pesticide residues or other toxins in their produce. This would make vegetables and fruits safer for consumption." Delhi food and civil supplies minister Raj Kumar Chauhan said: "With this laboratory we will be able to grade vegetables and fruits for the consumers. This will help them in looking for a mark before purchasing foodstuff."