

CDC Website Provides Raw Milk Information

“Raw Milk “Real Stories” Featured”



“Back to nature”-- that’s what many Americans are trying to do with the foods that they buy and eat. Many believe that foods with minimal or no processing, like organic and locally-grown foods, are better for their health. However, milk and products made from milk (including certain cheeses, ice cream, and yogurt), when consumed raw, can pose severe health risks. Mary McGonigle-Martin discovered the dangers of raw milk when her young son ended up in a California hospital for several weeks as doctors fought to save his life.

McGonigle-Martin considered herself to be a mom who did her homework. She decided to purchase raw milk for her 7-year-old son after reading an online article which claimed that there were health benefits from drinking raw milk. She was convinced that one brand was safe because it was “tested” by the farmer. “I was lulled into a false sense of security,” McGonigle-Martin said in one of three “*Real Stories of the Dangers of Raw Milk*” videos featured in CDC’s recently updated Food Safety and Raw Milk website.

After drinking the raw milk, which was contaminated with *E. coli*, McGonigle-Martin’s son became very sick. He was diagnosed with hemolytic-uremic syndrome, which can cause kidney failure. Doctors had to fight to save his life. Luckily, with help of dialysis and a ventilator, McGonigle-Martin’s son survived.

For some, getting sick from raw milk can mean many days of diarrhea, stomach cramping, and vomiting. For others, it can mean kidney failure, paralysis, chronic disorders, and even death. While it is possible to get foodborne illnesses from many different foods, raw milk is one of the riskiest of all. Raw milk and raw milk products, which include some cheeses and yogurts made with raw milk, can be contaminated with a variety of germs that can make people sick including *Brucella*, *Campylobacter*, *Listeria*, *Salmonella*, *Shiga toxin-producing E. coli* and norovirus, to name a few.

In order to kill these disease-causing germs, minimal processing, called pasteurization, is needed. Pasteurization

involves heating the milk briefly (for example heating it to 161 degrees F for about 20 seconds).

Many medical and scientific organizations recommend pasteurization for all milk consumed by humans; these include CDC, the Food and Drug Administration, the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Veterinary Medical Association, the National Association of State Public Health Veterinarians, and others.

Over the past 36 years, from 1973 to 2009, 82 percent of the dairy product-associated outbreaks reported to CDC were due to raw milk or cheese. From 1998 to 2009 there were 93 outbreaks due to the consumption of raw milk or raw milk products reported to CDC. These outbreaks resulted in 1,837 illnesses, 195 hospitalizations, and 2 deaths. Most of these illnesses were caused by *Escherichia coli* O157, *Campylobacter*, or *Salmonella*. Children are especially vulnerable to these raw milk-associated diseases; among the 93 raw dairy product outbreaks from 1998 to 2009, 79 percent involved at least one person less than 20 years old.

There are many local, small farms that offer pasteurized organic milk and cheese products.

Reported outbreaks represent the tip of the iceberg. Because not all people who get a foodborne illness seek healthcare, get diagnosed, or get reported to public health officials, the actual number of illnesses associated with raw milk likely is much higher.

Even if a farmer performs laboratory tests for bacteria, negative tests do not guarantee that raw milk is safe to drink. People, like McGonigle-Martin’s son and the families of two other mothers featured in the raw milk videos, have become very sick from drinking raw milk that came from farms. Farms that produce raw milk may regularly test their milk for bacteria and their owners may say that they are sure that their milk is safe. However, no matter what precautions farmers take, they cannot guarantee that their raw milk, or the products made from their raw milk, are free of harmful germs.

There is no way to know if your raw milk is safe. You can’t look at, smell, or taste a bottle of raw milk and tell if it’s safe to drink. Make the best decision for the health of your family. If you want to keep milk in your family’s diet, protect them by not giving them raw milk. Even healthy adults can get sick from drinking raw milk. If you’re thinking about drinking raw milk because you believe it has health benefits, consider other options.

For more information about raw milk, visit:

<http://www.cdc.gov/foodsafety/rawmilk/raw-milk-index.html>

To hear McGonigle-Martin’s story and other stories on the dangers of raw milk, visit:

www.cdc.gov/foodsafety/rawmilk/raw-milk-videos.html