



Raw milk products remain hazardous, according to AAP policy

by Patrick M. O'Connell • Digital Content Editor

As more people strive to eat local and seek unprocessed food for their families, a new AAP policy statement reiterates why one century-old process remains the safest option for pregnant women, infants and children.



Pasteurization of milk and products such as cheese, yogurt and ice cream continues to protect consumers against foodborne bacterial infection, especially those who are pregnant, young or have a medical condition.

The policy statement, *Consumption of Raw or Unpasteurized Milk and Milk Products by Pregnant Women and Children*, www.pediatrics.org/cgi/doi/10.1542/peds.2013-3502, urges women and children to avoid raw milk and unpasteurized cheese. It also encourages pediatricians to work with elected officials to ban the sale of raw milk products.

Raw animal milk and certain fresh cheeses, soft cheeses and soft-ripened cheeses from cows, goats and sheep can be the source of bacterial infections, including *Listeria monocytogenes*, *Campylobacter jejuni*, *Salmonella* species, *Brucella* species and *Escherichia coli* O157. These infections can be life-threatening and cause miscarriages, according to the policy.

The policy addresses only non-human milk. Breastfeeding recommendations are unaffected.

The move to more locally produced food is a positive one, but it must be done in conjunction with food safety and health guidelines, said Yvonne A. Maldonado, M.D., FAAP, one of the policy's lead authors. Families and mothers also should not sacrifice safety as they look for nutritious fruits, vegetables and local farm options in areas other than raw milk.



Dr. Maldonado

Pasteurization kills dangerous bacteria and reduces the risk of getting sick. The process involves raising the temperature of milk to at least 161 degrees for more than 15-20 seconds, followed by rapid cooling. Before pasteurization was introduced in the United States in the 1920s, raw milk contributed to a large amount of food-related illness.

Strong scientific evidence shows that pasteurized milk is just as nutritious as raw milk, according to the policy statement. Consumers of raw milk products often cite a desire for unprocessed foods, but the benefits of raw milk have not been backed up by research studies. About 1% to 3% of all dairy products eaten in the United States are not pasteurized.



Raw animal milk and unpasteurized cheese, yogurt and ice cream can be the source of bacterial infections. Women who are pregnant, infants and children should avoid raw milk products.

Raw milk products contributed to 195 hospital trips and two deaths in the United States between 1998 and 2009, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Drinking or eating raw milk products can put women at greater risk of pregnancy problems and infection. Infants and young children also are at risk.

Pediatricians should communicate these dangers to their patients and urge mothers to avoid raw milk products. On the advocacy level, pediatricians can help inform lawmakers about the dangers of raw milk and urge them to outlaw the sale of such products. The sale of raw milk products is legal in 30 states, but shipments between states are not allowed. The Academy endorses a ban on the sale of raw milk throughout the United States.

The Academy's position aligns with recommendations of the Food and Drug Administration and the CDC. The Academy also endorses the use of pasteurized milk in the 2012 *Red Book*.

RESOURCES

For more information about raw milk, visit <http://1.usa.gov/1JFAKcd> or <http://www.realrawmilkfacts.com>.