Consumption of Raw and Unpasteurized Milk and Milk Products

Official Position of the Iowa Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics

Many supporters of the consumption of unpasteurized milk and milk products believe that “The worst you can get from consuming raw milk is a few days of vomiting and diarrhea”. This is far from the truth, misleading and significantly underestimates the real risk of consuming raw milk. The presence of many organisms and pathogenic bacteria in unpasteurized dairy products has been demonstrated in multiple occasions. Amongst these pathogens are *Escherichia coli* O157 and *Campylobacter jejuni*. These microorganisms are responsible for the development of Hemolytic Uremic Syndrome (HUS) and Guillain-Barré syndrome (GBS) respectively, and can be transmitted from person-to-person. This means that not only people who consume potentially contaminated sources, including unpasteurized milk, may suffer from the illnesses they cause, but also their close contacts can be affected.

HUS is a severe condition that affects the red blood cells, platelets (clotting cells) and kidneys causing renal failure. Most of the affected patients are children under the age of 5 years. In many occasions the patients require dialysis and intensive care units management. Other organs can be affected severely, including the brain, heart and lungs. Mortality rates for HUS can be as high as 5% and another 5% have permanent damage (e.g., stroke or end-stage renal disease requiring chronic dialysis).

GBS can be equally devastating. This syndrome is a neurological disorder characterized by progressive weakness and paralysis. Typically the weakness starts in the legs and ascends to involve the muscles of the respiration in severe cases. *Campylobacter jejuni*, is one of the most common contaminants found in unpasteurized dairy products and is the most frequent antecedent pathogen that triggers the development of GBS. Mortality is approximately 3 to 4 percent, and usually is secondary to respiratory failure or cardiac complications. Recovery from GBS can take years or decades and millions of dollars to the health care system.

The scientific evidence against the human consumption of raw milk and milk products is robust and unquestionable. The risk of severe disease and death is real. The American Academy of Pediatrics through its Iowa Chapter strongly opposes the legalization of raw and unpasteurized milk products for human consumption.

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