

Raw Milk Poses Risk

The Kansas Department of Agriculture and Kansas Department of Health and Environment are warning consumers and producers about the risks associated with consuming unpasteurized milk, often called raw milk.

A study by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) published last month indicated that when weighted for consumption the rate of outbreaks caused by raw milk and products made from it may be 150 times greater than outbreaks linked to pasteurized milk.

Pasteurization is the process of heating milk to slow microbial growth. In Kansas, it is illegal to sell raw milk in a retail setting. While dairy producers can legally sell raw milk on farms directly to consumers, the practice is not recommended.

“Consuming raw milk is an unnecessary risk,” said Kansas Department of Agriculture Dairy Inspection Program Manager George Blush. “You cannot tell if milk is safe by just looking at, smelling or tasting it. Even milk from the cleanest dairies can pose risk without the pasteurization safeguard.”

The department’s dairy inspections start at the farm and continue as the milk and milk products are transported, processed, distributed and sold. The goal is to provide a safe, wholesome milk supply for Kansans and consumers in other states. Providing or consuming raw milk runs contradictory to this goal.

Since 2007, there have been three outbreaks of disease associated with consumption of raw milk in Kansas. In October 2007, 68 people became ill due to consuming cheese made from raw milk at a Kansas community celebration. Laboratory tests confirmed the cause of this outbreak to be campylobacteriosis, an intestinal bacterial infection. In a separate outbreak in 2007, unpasteurized milk purchased from a single dairy was also implicated as the source of illness for 25 persons due to campylobacteriosis. More recently, reported in January 2012, 18 people became ill in an outbreak of campylobacteriosis associated with consumption of raw milk from a dairy in south central Kansas.

The CDC study reviewed dairy product outbreaks from 1993 to 2006 in all 50 states. Outbreaks of diseases linked to raw milk products were more frequent and more severe in people younger than age 20. The rate of hospitalizations was 13 times higher in outbreaks associated with unpasteurized products compared to those associated with products that were pasteurized.

Raw milk can contain harmful bacteria and other germs that can cause diarrhea, vomiting and abdominal cramping. In severe cases, consuming raw milk can cause life-threatening diseases and even death. KDHE Secretary and State Health Officer Robert Moser, M.D., said if an individual has consumed raw milk purchased directly from a farm or eaten dairy products made with raw milk and develop signs and symptoms of illness, they should consult their physician.

To view the CDC study, published in the CDC journal “Emerging Infectious Diseases,” visit www.cdc.gov/eid. To learn more about the Kansas Department of Agriculture Dairy Inspection Program, visit <http://ksda.gov/dairy/>.