

Health Professionals Speak Out About Proposed Raw Milk Legislation in Iowa

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Public health professionals, Drs. Russell Currier and Mary Gilchrist, provided the Des Moines Register with a thought-provoking editorial on a raw milk bill being considered by the 2012 Iowa Legislature. If passed, the legislation would permit sales of raw milk on the farm directly to consumers or for targeted home delivery by producers without any regulation or oversight:

The 2012 Iowa Legislature is again considering legislation to permit sales of raw milk on the farm directly to consumers or for targeted home delivery by producers without any regulation or oversight.

This is really a bad idea and will eventually result in milk-borne illness — sometimes with serious complications.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration, which has oversight of interstate commerce, wisely does not permit sales and distribution of unpasteurized milk and neither should the state of Iowa.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control website (www.cdc.gov/foodsafety) warns against consumption of raw milk, particularly emphasizing the hazards to vulnerable populations, especially young children.

Another website, www.realrawmilkfacts.com, provides videos in which families tell of their agony after feeding raw milk to a loved one believing it would help them and then finding that the loved one lost kidney function or was paralyzed with Guillain-Barre disease.

Everyone who votes on the pending legislation should be required to review these two websites first.

Foods are now labeled with hazard messages regarding the potential to contain traces of allergens such as peanuts or gluten.

If this legislation is passed, we recommend similar “truth in labeling” be required as follows:

“Caution, this product could contain traces of bacteria such as:

E. coli strains that can destroy children’s kidneys and sometimes kill them.

Campylobacter that causes bloody diarrhea and sometimes paralysis or joint afflictions.

Listeria that causes meningitis that is often fatal to the elderly and causes abortions in pregnant women.

Consume at your own risk.”

Citing superior taste and claiming health benefits that cannot be substantiated with well-controlled, large studies, advocates for raw milk argue that they should have the right to consume whatever they wish.

Should that right be extended to what they feed their children? We have laws that protect children, requiring protections such as auto safety seats.

Should that right be extended to allow them to transmit such infections to others, which is easily done in childcare and other congregate settings?

Should that right extend to their raising the tax burden on all Iowans when expensive outbreak investigations are necessary?

Should that right extend to increasing health care costs for everyone when sickened people are hospitalized for extended periods and may require dialysis for years?

Many of the people who drank raw milk as children and were lucky to have survived may have a degree of immunity to the pathogens that sickened them.

Until recently, E.coli O157 and Campylobacter were probably present but were as yet unknown to science. Even now, their detection in human illness is uneven, making detected cases the “tip of the iceberg.”

Women who suffered abortions were probably not aware that they had a Listeria infection that caused it.

Cryptosporidium was not widely recognized as a cause of human disease until the 1980s and is still unevenly detected even when it is present causing diarrhea of prolonged duration.

Well-intended people who extol the virtues of raw milk because they have not had recognized illnesses themselves have been responsible for many severe illnesses among those whose immune systems had not experienced such infections.

Thanks to judicious decisions by our Legislature, Iowa remains one of the states that does not allow any sales of raw milk, in any form, and under any circumstance.

Witness Pennsylvania where as of Feb. 13, 65 people (56 in Pennsylvania, four in Maryland, three in West Virginia and two in New Jersey) have been sickened recently with campylobacteriosis by drinking raw milk.

The status quo of prohibiting sales of raw milk as such should be maintained as being in the best interest of the public's health as well as the economy.

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Read the original opinion piece:

<http://www.desmoinesregister.com/article/20120219/OPINION01/302190033/-1/BUSINESS04/Iowa-view-Unpasteurized-milk-unnecessary-legislation> (LINK NO LONGER WORKS)