



New numbers link illness to raw milk products

Madison cheese experts react to FDA study

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MADISON, Wis. -

The Food and Drug Administration has new numbers to back up its advisories that certain people should avoid raw milk products.

The study looked at dairy-related disease from 1993 to 2006. Raw milk products were the cause of 60 percent of outbreaks across the country, and 200 of the 239 hospitalizations were connected to raw milk.



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An assortment of cheeses at Fromagination in downtown Madison.

Tyler Mueller at Fromagination in downtown Madison said some customers prefer the taste and health benefits of raw milk cheeses, but he does disclose the ingredient to anyone who might not be aware.

“Not necessarily because they're 100 percent more safe,” Mueller explained, “but because they're concerned about possible side effects with consuming raw milk.”

The FDA advises that pregnant women and people with weak immune systems stay away from raw milk products due to the increased risk of disease.

Federal regulations already require cheese makers to age raw milk cheeses for at least 60 days. Wisconsin Cheese Makers Association Executive Director John Umhoefer said that's to give the cheese plenty of time to rid itself of bad bacteria.

In the latest study, the FDA does open the possibility of extending that mandatory aging period.

“I don't think you'll see raw milk disappear under the FDA's ideas,” Umhoefer said. “I think they're just going to make those hurdles much higher for the bacteria to survive.”

Director of the Wisconsin Center for Dairy Research John Lucey researches milk and cheese for a living. He said while the new data quantifies pre-existing government warnings, the FDA didn't make this study completely relevant for American regulations. Lucey noted that the type of cheese looked at in the study has a higher pH level, making it more prone to pathogens in the first place. On top of that, the category of cheese is not typically aged to the 60 day minimum.

“I think it's possible that the FDA would go and say for different categories, we're not going to give you the option of having raw, just because it's too risky,” Lucey said.

After working with cheese for four years, Mueller said any food can be dangerous, and for his product, it's about quality products from quality vendors.

“It comes down to the way it's produced, the way it's handled, and the way it's cared for,” Mueller said.

The Centers for Disease control has more information on this topic in a recent [news release](#).

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