

My name is Mary McGonigle-Martin. I am the Co-Board Chair of STOP Foodborne Illness and the mother of a child who almost died from a foodborne illness.

Fifteen and a half years ago when my son became severely ill after drinking contaminated raw milk, I knew very little about the realities of contracting a foodborne illness. Despite the fact I'm educated and hold a master's degree, I was naïve about foodborne pathogens. We all know someone who has eaten something and then hours later or the next day was sick. This was my foodborne illness knowledge base. I believed the worst that could happen is a few days of diarrhea and vomiting.

In the spring of 2006, the health food store where our family shops began selling raw milk. Huge signs hung in the store to catch customers' attention claiming raw milk could heal asthma, allergies and digestive issues. My son was always congested after drinking pasteurized milk and he also suffers from ADD. I began to contemplate buying raw milk to see if it would help him. Had I not lived in California where raw milk is available in the grocery store, I would have **never** purchased it for my son. This is not a food I would have sought out in another manner illegally from a nearby farmer or herd share program. The only reason I bought it is that it was readily available.

Initially I had some reservations, but the organization that encourages parents to feed their infants and children raw milk only focus on the benefits; the risks of drinking raw milk are down played. The company that sold the milk had detailed information on the company's website about how they feed the cows grass and test the milk for pathogens, so I thought it would be safe to drink. When I made the choice to buy raw milk from the grocery store, I didn't know what choice I was really making. I never did see the microscopic state warning label on the back of the bottle.

I almost killed my son when I made the decision to give him raw milk. During his two month stay in the hospital, he endured endless hours on a ventilator, kidney dialysis, chest drainage tubes, central lines, PICC lines, blood, plasma and platelet transfusions, intravenous nutrition, narcotics, antibiotics, and surgeries. He recovered from renal failure, congestive heart failure, a collapsed lung, acute pancreatitis, high blood pressure and seizures. When I made the choice to give my son raw milk, I didn't know something so horrific could happen to him. <http://www.cdc.gov/foodsafety/rawmilk/raw-milk-videos.html>

If I could turn back the clock to August of 2006, this is the information about raw milk I wish I knew:

1. All foodborne illnesses are preventable, especially from milk. Over 100 years ago, it was discovered if you cooked milk, like you cook meat, poultry and eggs it kills deadly pathogens. Pasteurization was invented for a reason. As a society, we are too far removed from the horrors that occurred to children over 100 years ago. We really don't comprehend the damage that can be done if the milk is contaminated. We suffer from generational amnesia.
2. Raw milk is a high risk food for deadly pathogens because they live in cow's feces. Cows lie in their own feces and defecate while be milked. The position of the cow's teats to the anus can cause cow feces to get into the milk. It is impossible to milk cows twice a day 365 days a year without making a mistake. Eventually, a pathogen will find its way into the milk. When people make a choice to drink raw milk, they are making a choice to possibly consume deadly pathogens.
3. Infants, children, the elderly, pregnant woman and anyone with a compromised immune system are at the greatest risk of becoming ill from contaminated raw milk. These high risk groups should not consume raw milk.

4. There are three pathogens that cause the majority of raw milk outbreaks: Campylobacter, Salmonella and E.coli O157:H7. The illnesses start out the same with severe diarrhea and possible vomiting, but each pathogen can cause other types of serious damage unique to the specific pathogen.

Campylobacter: This pathogen can cause reactive arthritis and Guillain-Barre Syndrome which leads to paralysis.

Salmonella: This pathogen can cause a blood infection, irritable-bowel syndrome and reactive arthritis. Antibiotic resistance makes Salmonella difficult to treat.

Ecoli. O157:H7: This deadly pathogen is a game changer for raw milk! Ecoli O157:H7 can lead to Hemolytic Uremic Syndrome (HUS), the most common cause of kidney failure in children. Some children eventually will need a kidney transplant. Children suffering HUS can also lose part or all of their colon, suffer pancreatitis, seizures and strokes. Seizures and strokes can lead to permanent neurological damage.

5. When there are raw milk outbreaks, the majority of victims are children. Since 2005, there have been 17 E.coli O157:H7 raw milk outbreaks with verified state public health reports. This is the same pathogen that almost killed my son. These 17 outbreaks caused 155 illnesses, 67 hospitalizations (43%) and 44 children under 18 years old developed HUS. It is shocking to think that 28%--over ¼ of children--developed this syndrome that leads to kidney failure after drinking raw milk contaminated with this pathogen.
6. In the state of California, raw milk is sold retail. Despite this milk being regulated, tested, and deemed safe, outbreaks still occur. One dairy has had three E.coli O157:H7 outbreaks: 2006, 2011 and 2016. A total of 7 children developed HUS and yet this dairy is still in business. Each raw milk outbreak is a financial cost to the state of California.

Based upon my firsthand experience, I keenly understand why a host of professional organizations do not support the consumption of raw milk, especially for children. To name a few: the American Medical Association, the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Association of Public Health Veterinarians, the National Environmental Health Association, the Center for Disease Control and the Food and Drug Administration.

The victim videos on the Real Raw Milk Facts website are examples of why the above professional organizations do not support the consumption of raw milk. Kylee Young's and Mari Tardiff's stories are the most heartbreaking. <https://realrawmilkfacts.com/real-life-stories>

Sincerely,

Mary McGonigle-Martin
STOP Foodborne Illness Co-Board Chair
Mother of Christopher Martin