Regarding "Raw (Unpasteurized) Milk: Are Health-Conscious Consumers Making an Unhealthy Choice?"

To the Editor—I read with interest the recent editorial commentary by Jay-Russell [1], which succinctly and expertly discussed the ramifications of an outbreak of infection due to Escherichia coli O157:NM associated with the consumption of unpasteurized milk in Connecticut in July of 2008 [2]. The editorial comments provided additional emphasis on the economic and health impact of this and other raw milk–associated outbreaks. Jay-Russell [1] highlights the irrational sentiments of individuals who believe that personal choice regarding the consumption of unpasteurized products outweigh the notable morbidity and mortality that results from that consumption. I cannot agree more with Jay-Russell’s comments.

However, I must take issue with Jay-Russell’s statement, “For those who value the perceived ‘probiotic’ bacteria in raw milk and eschew processed foods, messages promoting pasteurization or even alternatives to pasteurization, such as filtration, sonication, and irradiation, are not likely to be effective.” Although I concur with the theme of this sentence completely, the use of the term “probiotic” is incorrect. The accepted definition of a probiotic is “…live microorganisms which when administered in adequate amount confer a health benefit on the host” [3]. Regulatory guidelines have been developed for the inclusion of probiotic organisms in food products [4]. The potentially pathogenic organisms that thrive in unpasteurized products are not comparable to beneficial probiotic organisms. Because probiotic strains are live microorganisms, the potential for sepsis and adverse effects associated with their consumption exists; however, these events are rare [5] and are not comparable to the illness associated with the consumption of unpasteurized products.

Pasteurization removes pathogenic organisms. Probiotics are beneficial microorganisms. This distinction should be maintained.

Acknowledgments

Potential conflicts of interest. A. L. S. has received travel expenses from the International Scientific Association for Probiotics and Prebiotics (ISAPP).

Andi L. Shane
Division of Pediatric Infectious Diseases, Emory University School of Medicine, Department of Pediatrics, Atlanta, Georgia
References


Correspondence: Andi L. Shane, MD, MPH, MSc, Div of Pediatric Infectious Diseases, Emory University School of Medicine, 2015 Uppergate Drive NE, Rm 552, Atlanta, GA, 30322 (ashane@emory.edu).

Clinical Infectious Diseases 2011;52(11):1392–1393
© The Author 2011. Published by Oxford University Press on behalf of the Infectious Diseases Society of America. All rights reserved. For Permissions, please e-mail: journals.permissions@oup.com.
1058-4838/2011/5211-0022 $14.00
DOI: 10.1093/cid/cir236