



UNPASTEURIZED FRUIT JUICE AND CIDER

Background

Canada has enjoyed a long history of providing safe, high quality juice and cider to consumers. Nevertheless, unpasteurized juice or cider has been linked to several food poisoning outbreaks in the United States and Canada over the years.

Disease-causing organisms such as *Escherichia coli* O157:H7, *Salmonella* spp., *Cryptosporidium*, have been known to cause illness in people after they consumed unpasteurized juice/cider. The organism most often identified in recent outbreaks is *E. coli* O157:H7.

Three outbreaks of illness from *E. coli* O157:H7 in the United States in 1996 were linked to unpasteurized juice/cider. These incidents proved that harmful bacteria can survive in high acid products such as juice or cider, if contaminated. Until recently, scientists did not think this was possible. In the fall of 1998 in Ontario, 14 cases of food-borne illness including seven cases of confirmed *E. coli* O157:H7, were reported. Unpasteurized juice/cider was suspected in these cases. Local health officials identified one batch of unpasteurized non-commercial, custom-pressed apple cider as the most likely source.

Contamination

Raw fruit does not naturally contain such illness-causing organisms. It may become contaminated if it falls to the ground and comes into contact with animal droppings. Other possible sources of contamination include harmful bacteria in water used for growing or processing the fruit, improper food handling practices and soiled equipment.

The Health Canada Policy

Health Canada introduced a policy in the year 2000 to encourage producers of unpasteurized juice/cider to voluntarily label their products as "UNPASTEURIZED" or "NON PASTEURISÉ". The department also informs producers, through a Code of Practice, about hygienic manufacturing practices they can follow to avoid contaminating the juice/cider product. The goal is to continue to produce safe, high quality juice/cider for Canadian consumers.

Pasteurized Juice/Cider

Juice/cider that is pasteurized has been treated to kill harmful bacteria and to extend shelf-life. Pasteurized products include all products packaged in cans, bottles and juice boxes that are found unrefrigerated in the juice section of the grocery store. These products are often referred to as shelf-stable. Concentrated juice and juice from concentrate are also pasteurized. Additionally, some juice/cider that is sold in refrigerated display cases or at produce sections of the store may indicate on their labels that they are pasteurized. Consumers can check for such labelling information directly on juice packages.

Unpasteurized Juice/Cider

Unpasteurized juice/cider does not undergo treatment. Often it can be purchased as freshly pressed from local orchards, roadside stands, farmers markets, country fairs and juice bars. Unpasteurized juice/cider may also be found on ice or in refrigerated display cases and in produce sections at grocery stores.

As a result of the Health Canada policy, consumers can check the product label to identify unpasteurized juice/cider. If there is no indication on the label, they can ask their retailer or local producer, or phone the information number on the product label. The name and address of a responsible party should be shown on all packaged food products. If not satisfied with the answers provided, consumers should consider the risk of consuming the product.

Reducing the Risk of Illness

While the likelihood of becoming ill from consuming unpasteurized juice/cider is low, it remains a concern, particularly for those in high risk groups. Young children, the elderly and people with weakened immune systems are most susceptible to complications from illness caused by E. coli O157:H7.

E. coli is a natural inhabitant of the intestines of all animals. Most strains are harmless or even beneficial, but some strains can cause human illness. One of these strains, E. coli O157:H7, can result in a condition called haemorrhagic colitis. Symptoms of this condition include stomach cramps, vomiting, fever, and bloody diarrhoea. People who experience these symptoms should contact their doctor immediately. A small percentage of people can develop haemolytic uremic syndrome. This disease may also require the patient to undergo blood transfusions and kidney dialysis. It can lead to permanent loss of kidney function and can be fatal in some cases.

People in these high-risk groups are advised to drink juice/cider that is pasteurized, or bring unpasteurized juice/cider to a boil before consuming it.

It is not possible to guarantee complete elimination of harmful microorganisms from unpasteurized juice/cider. Consumers are advised to keep these products refrigerated and to respect the "best before" date that is printed on the package.

Need More Info?

For further information, visit the sites listed below :

www.hc-sc.gc.ca/food-aliment

www.inspection.gc.ca/english/pla-veg/processed/codee.shtml

Or:

Contact your local Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) office or local Health Unit.