
INFORMATION BULLETIN

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Ministry of Health Services

HEALTH WARNING ON RAW APPLE JUICE

VICTORIA – With unpasteurized apple juice readily available at the farm gate during the fall season, provincial health officer Dr. Perry Kendall is issuing a public reminder that unpasteurized fruit juices can become infected with harmful bacteria.

To ensure safety, unpasteurized juice should be boiled for at least a minute before drinking it. Health Canada advises people in vulnerable groups including young children, the elderly and people with weakened immune systems not to drink unpasteurized juice or cider.

While most juice sold in B.C. is treated and safe, the safety of untreated, unpasteurized product cannot be guaranteed.

Unpasteurized juices have been linked to outbreaks of gastrointestinal illness in both Canada and the U.S. The most severe form of illness is caused by *Escherichia coli* 0157:H7. Symptoms of infection with *E.coli* can include stomach cramps, vomiting and bloody diarrhea. In up to eight per cent of people, the condition can lead to severe kidney damage and death with the greatest risk in children under 5 years.

B.C. Centre for Disease Control data show 155 *E coli* infections have been reported so far this year in B.C., with 33 cases affecting children under the age of 5. No case to date has been linked to juice. The last outbreak in Canada linked to unpasteurized apple juice occurred in Ontario in 1998 and affected 14 people with 7 confirmed cases of *E.coli* 0157:H7.

Health Canada encourages producers of unpasteurized juice to follow a voluntary code of practice for hygienic production and distribution of unpasteurized juices and ciders and to label their products as unpasteurized.

Check product labels to determine if a juice is pasteurized or not. If the label does not give this information, consumers can ask their retailer or producer, or phone the information number on the product label. If they are unable to get satisfactory information, consumers should consider the risks before using the product. Chief medical officers of health across Canada agree that none of the other advocated hygienic production processes can guarantee a product free of bacterial contamination if it has not been heat-treated.

Consumer Tips – Reducing the Risk

- Boil unpasteurized juice or cider before consuming.
- Avoid serving unpasteurized products to those most at risk, (young children, the elderly, and people with weakened immune systems).
- Don't rely on freezing or refrigeration to make unpasteurized juices or ciders safe.
- Ensure freshness and quality by refrigerating juice products and respecting their best-before dates.
- See a doctor immediately at the first sign food contamination. Symptoms include stomach cramps, vomiting, fever and diarrhea and can occur within two to 10 days of consuming contaminated food.

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