

February 19, 2013

To Representatives of the House Local Government Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity for me to provide you with comments regarding House Study Bill 131, "An Act Allowing Certain Milk and Products Using Milk to be Transferred Directly by Operators of Dairy Farms and Making Penalties Applicable." In short, this bill will allow for the sale of unpasteurized raw milk directly to consumers, an activity that puts the public's health of Iowa at serious risk. I want to urge you on behalf of all the leading public health and infectious disease experts to reject this bill as it is based on an orchestrated effort to misrepresent scientific facts. The consumption of unpasteurized raw milk has been definitely linked to many fatal and serious illnesses in recent years.

Please understand, I come at this as a native Iowa son. While I currently serve as the Director of the Center for Infectious Disease Research and Policy and Professors of Public Health and Medicine at the University of Minnesota, I was born and raised in Waukon. More information on my credentials and expertise can be found at: <http://www.cidrap.umn.edu/cidrap/center/about/staff/articles/osterholm.html>. I also have built a residence and spend substantial time near Dorchester, Iowa.

Pasteurized milk and milk products are healthy and wholesome foods, and represent an important part of our daily diet. However, unpasteurized raw milk and associated products represent a serious risk of infectious diseases to consumers, many who are mistakenly led to believe that these products are actually safer. Efforts to pasteurize milk products began more than 100 years ago as widespread outbreaks of several serious infectious diseases occurred directly related to the consumption of raw milk. Substantial scientific work showed that heat treatment of milk known as pasteurization was effective in killing these disease-causing bacteria and did not subsequently change the nutritional aspects of the milk. While some may claim that it is possible to produce a milk free of disease-causing bacteria, such a statement is irresponsible and without any substantial scientific evidence. Under the most hygienic of conditions, fecal matter from cows and organisms naturally occurring in the teats of milking cows presents an ever constant source of bacteria getting into the raw milk. Outbreaks of raw milk-associated illness continue to be commonly reported throughout the United States where raw milk consumption is allowed to occur or as the result of the illegal sale of that milk to consumers.

During my years as state epidemiologist at the Minnesota Department of Health, our group reported on numerous milkborne outbreaks associated with the illegal sale or limited sale directly from the farm of raw milk in our state. One of these outbreaks, which occurred in 1984, occurred among 122 residence of the community of Brainerd, Minnesota. We were able to demonstrate that a new disease recognized now as Brainerd diarrhea occurred as a result of consumption from raw milk from a single, Grade A dairy farm in the Brainerd area. This farm employed the highest levels of sanitary conditions on the farm. More than one half of the 122 Brainerd diarrhea cases remained ill for more than one year; with many having 20 to 25 episodes of diarrhea per day. This disease resulted in many of these individuals not being able to work for extended periods and the mounting of substantial medical bills. Since our discovery of Brainerd diarrhea, other raw milk associated outbreaks of this disease have been documented.

Passage of a bill to allow the sale of unpasteurized raw milk will be a major step backward in Iowa's public health efforts. Enacting this bill into law will also guarantee serious damage to Iowa's milk industry. With the passage of this bill, there will be a sudden and significant rise in the number of unpasteurized raw milk-associated outbreaks occurring in the state. These will be detailed by the media and the general public will be confused as to the source of the outbreaks, other than knowing that it's associated with milk. We have demonstrated when this situation occurs, overall milk consumption will decrease, needlessly reducing the consumption of the healthy and nutritious pasteurized milk and harming the dairy industry. In addition, the media will replay the current debate being held at the Iowa Legislature regarding this bill and ask questions as to why legislators passed it in the first instance given the inevitable increase in outbreaks associated with the sale of unpasteurized raw milk. There is no need for either of these scenarios to unfold, if in fact this bill is defeated.

Every recognized scientific, medical, public health and microbiology professional organization or advisory group in the world have concluded there is a substantial risk for serious infectious diseases to occur with the consumption of unpasteurized raw milk. To allow these baseless claims to stand against a thorough and exhaustive body of scientific evidence would be tragic. I encourage you to keep this in mind when you consider this bill. Also, to avoid injury, both to the citizens of Iowa and the Iowa dairy industry, it will be important for you to recognize the facts and not respond to emotional pleas from individuals without any credible scientific evidence.

I hope this information is helpful to you through your deliberations.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michael T. Osterholm". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Dr. Michael T. Osterholm  
Director, Center for Infectious Disease Research and Policy  
Director, Minnesota Center of Excellence for Influenza Research and Surveillance  
Professor, Division of Environmental Health Sciences, Minnesota School of Public Health  
Adjunct Professor, University of Minnesota Medical School