



Unpasteurized Fruit Juice/Cider

Health Canada and the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) are advising parents and caregivers that children should not be served unpasteurized apple juice or other unpasteurized products, such as unpasteurized cider, fruit juices and raw milk.

Unpasteurized products have the potential to be contaminated with harmful bacteria, such as *Salmonella* and *Escherichia coli* O157:H7, which can make vulnerable individuals such as children, especially those under the age of six, very ill and even lead to death.

The elderly and people with weakened immune systems are also advised against consuming unpasteurized products.

Canada has enjoyed a long history of providing safe, high quality juice and cider to consumers. The vast majority of these products are pasteurized, such as shelf-stable products packaged in cans, bottles and juice boxes. However, unpasteurized juice and cider have been implicated in food poisoning outbreaks in the United States and Canada.

Disease-causing organisms such as *E. coli* O157:H7, *Salmonella*, *Cryptosporidium* and viruses have been known to cause illness in people after consuming unpasteurized juice/cider.

There have been two separate outbreaks of foodborne illness associated with unpasteurized cider produced in Canada; one in 1980 and another in 1998 - each involving about 14 cases of foodborne illness. Local health officials identified one batch of non-commercial, custom-pressed apple cider as the most likely source in the 1998 outbreak.



What's being done to reduce the possibility of contamination?

Representatives from the CFIA, Health Canada, the provinces, industry and consumer groups worked together to determine the best approach to reduce the risk of bacterial contamination from unpasteurized fruit juice and cider. The Code of Practice for the Production and Distribution of Unpasteurized Apple and Other Fruit Juice/Cider in Canada was developed to outline the steps producers, processors, distributors and retailers can

take to reduce the possibility of contamination. The goal is to continue to produce safe, high quality juice/cider for Canadian consumers.

In addition, the CFIA stepped up its inspection and sampling program for unpasteurized juice/cider and continues to monitor known producers and their products and provide them with updated information as it becomes available.

In July 2000, Health Canada introduced a new policy advocating the use of a Code of Practice, encouraging the labelling of

“unpasteurized” on unpasteurized juice/cider products, and launching a consumer awareness campaign.

Health Canada is considering making the labelling “unpasteurized” mandatory on unpasteurized fruit juices and cider products. Health Canada will be holding a stakeholder consultation on proposed labelling options this fall.

Who is most susceptible and what should they do to prevent illness?

The risk of becoming ill from consuming unpasteurized juice/cider is low. However, children, the elderly and people with weakened immune systems are most susceptible to complications from illness caused by *E. coli* O157:H7. People in these high-risk groups are advised to drink pasteurized juice/cider, or bring unpasteurized juice/cider to a boil before consuming it. They are also advised not to consume unpasteurized juice/cider that may be available at restaurants, institutions and at group or family activities such as visits to local orchards.

How does fruit juice/cider become contaminated?

Bacteria such as *E. coli* O157:H7 live in the intestines of animals. Fruit juice/cider may become contaminated when the raw fruit used to prepare the juice/cider has fallen to the ground and comes into contact with these bacteria from animal droppings. Contamination can also occur when the water used in the orchard or during processing contains harmful bacteria, or

from improper food handling practices or soiled equipment. Foodborne illness-causing bacteria can survive in the final product if it is not pasteurized. Freezing will not destroy the harmful bacteria.

What are the symptoms of an *E. coli* O157:H7 infection?

Symptoms can include stomach cramps, vomiting, fever and bloody diarrhea and can occur within two to 10 days of consuming contaminated food. People who experience any of these symptoms should contact their doctors immediately. A small percentage of people can develop hemolytic uremic syndrome, which may require blood transfusions and kidney dialysis. The disease can lead to permanent loss of kidney function and can be fatal.

How do I know if the product I'm buying has been pasteurized?

The vast majority of juice sold in Canada is pasteurized. This includes all shelf-stable product packaged in cans, bottles and juice boxes, which can be found unrefrigerated on grocery store shelves, and all concentrated juice and juice from concentrate. Most of the juice sold in refrigerated display cases is also pasteurized. Juice/cider sold in the produce sections of grocery stores, or at roadside stands, farm markets and country fairs may or may not have been pasteurized. Consumers can check the label and if unsure, can ask their retailer or local producer. Most unpasteurized juice/cider is purchased as freshly pressed unpasteurized juice/cider from local orchards, cider mills, roadside stands and juice bars.

When buying unpasteurized juice/cider, what else can retailers and consumers do?

Before purchasing unpasteurized juice/cider, both retailers and consumers should check with the producer or vendor to determine if the juice/cider was produced according to the Code of Practice.

For more information:

- Visit the Health Canada Food Safety page at: www.healthcanada.gc.ca/foodsafety
- The Code of Practice can be found on the CFIA Web site at: www.inspection.gc.ca/english/plaveg/protra/codee.shtml
- The Code of Practice was prepared in partnership with Health Canada, the Consumers' Association of Canada, the Canadian Horticultural Council, the Canadian Produce Marketing Association, the Food Institute of Canada and the Canadian Council of Grocery Distributors.

You can also contact your local CFIA office as follows:

- Ontario - Irene Mentis - (416) 973-1433

Media Inquiries:

- Carole Saindon, Health Canada (613) 957-1588