Mother warns against feeding raw milk to children

Angela Bowman, Staff Writer   |   Updated: May 10, 2012

“There’s just an inherit risk in feeding your children raw milk that you can’t — you can’t — ignore."

That’s what one mother told Oregon Public Broadcasting this week.

Jill, who asked not to be identified on-air, described the ordeal that her two-year-old daughter has had to endure since becoming sick from raw milk.

"She had strokes early on and pressure in the brain, and most recently had emergency surgery to remove some dead bowel and colon. And now has an ostomy, that will get reversed in six to eight weeks," Jill told OPB News. Click here to download and listen to the full show, which also featured interviews with a local raw milk producer and health officials.

Raw milk producers and advocates argue that the benefits of drinking raw milk outweigh the risks and that the outbreak in Oregon (involving others besides Jill's daughter) is an anomaly.

For Jill, who will be celebrating Mother’s Day beside her daughter’s hospital bed, the risks outweigh the benefits.

“No matter how good of a farmer and how good of a dairy operation you think they have, there’s always a slim chance that there’s going to be bacteria in that [raw] milk. The only way to make sure there’s not that chance is by pasteurization. And there’s going to be more outbreaks,” she said in the interview. “To watch my daughter struggle for her life for 28 days so far, it’s not worth it.”

A similar outbreak in Missouri has also been linked to raw milk, and like Jill’s daughter, three children were hospitalized after developing symptoms hemolytic uremic syndrome, a complication of E. coli infection that leads to kidney failure.

One veteran dairy farmer from central Missouri voiced his concern for the outbreaks linked to raw milk and how raw milk problems could be linked to his pasteurized products, giving all dairy products a bad reputation.

Earlier this year a campylobacteriosis outbreak sickened more than 78 people, including a three-year old, across four states. The outbreak was linked to raw milk sold from a farm near Chambersburg, Pa.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reported that between 1998 and 2009 it found about 1800 illness related to raw milk. Of those illnesses, 200 required hospitalization and
two were fatal. A report released by the CDC in February showed that the rate of outbreaks caused by raw milk was 150 times greater than outbreaks linked to pasteurized milk.