

Cookie dough gets a raw deal

By Washington Post, adapted by Newsela staff on 12.17.18

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The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention is warning people not to eat cookie dough, a temptation at holiday time. Photo: Goran Kosanovic for The Washington Post

The cookies are in the oven. The mixing bowl, still coated with the sugary sweet dough, is calling your name.

Don't listen to it, health experts warn.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, or CDC, is urging people not to eat unbaked cookie dough. The CDC, which is part of the government, says "unbaked products that are intended to be cooked, such as dough or batter, can make you sick."

"Say No to Raw Dough!" the CDC warns.

Eggs And Flour Are The Culprits

The problem is with two ingredients.

Raw flour can be contaminated with *Escherichia coli*, more commonly known as *E. coli*. Raw eggs have been a known carrier of salmonella bacteria.

Both bacteria are killed in the cooking process. Contaminated food that is not cooked or that is undercooked has been known to make people ill, according to the CDC.

"When you're making cookies, often the recipe calls for raw eggs," said Lindsay Malone, a dietitian. "Whenever you consume raw eggs, you increase your risk of salmonella poisoning.

"When there's a risk for salmonella, you really want to be cautious and take steps to avoid it as much as possible," Malon added.

Health experts have become more vocal about raw flour.

The CDC said that more than 60 people across the United States got *E. coli* from raw flour in 2016.

Resist. The. Spoon.

According to the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, people should not taste-test batter or dough for any baked goods.

The CDC also said that children should not play with the dough because they can get sick from handling it.

The health agency sounds the alarm about eating raw cookie dough every year around this time. Many people are making cookies and baking treats for the holidays.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Food Safety and Inspection typically agrees with the CDC.

However, not all health experts agree that raw cookie dough is dangerous.

Wait, There's A Better Egg?

Brian Zikmund-Fisher is an expert on Health Behavior and Health Education at the University of Michigan. He said that his family eats raw cookie dough "regularly."

"To start, when most people think about health risks and cookie dough, they think about raw egg. Eggs can be contaminated with salmonella bacteria, and food safety recommendations encourage people to cook eggs until the white and yolk are firm in order to kill any bacteria," Zikmund-Fisher wrote.

"Because of this concern, when my kids and I make cookie dough, we never use regular eggs. Instead, we use eggs that have been pasteurized to kill any harmful bacteria without actually cooking the egg itself. (A great public health innovation, if you ask me!) So, I wasn't worried about the eggs in the cookie dough."

Eggs or other products that are pasteurized have been heated to destroy harmful pathogens. The process destroys most of the microorganisms that cause food to spoil and can make the food product last longer.

Zikmund-Fisher said that contamination from raw flour is "rare."

Cookie Dough Tummy Blues

Symptoms from E. coli infection typically appear within several days and can include severe stomach pain, diarrhea and vomiting. Symptoms of a salmonella infection are similar but might also include a fever. With both illnesses, patients usually recover within a week.

The CDC suggests not eating raw cookie dough or cake batter. People should not make homemade ice cream or milkshakes with the uncooked ingredients. However, cookie dough ice cream bought at the store or an ice cream shop is typically safe because it is made with flour and eggs that are treated and free of bacteria.

The CDC also urges people to wash their hands with warm, soapy water. All work surfaces, dishes and utensils should be well-cleaned when working with raw eggs and flour.

Quiz

- 1 Which sentence from the article would be MOST important to include in a summary of the article?
- (A) The mixing bowl, still coated with the sugary sweet dough, is calling your name.
 - (B) The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, or CDC, is urging people not to eat unbaked cookie dough.
 - (C) Raw flour can be contaminated with *Escherichia coli*, more commonly known as *E. coli*.
 - (D) The CDC also said that children should not play with the dough because they can get sick from handling it.

- 2 Read the following paragraph from section “Cookie Dough Tummy Blues.”

Symptoms from E. coli infection typically appear within several days and can include severe stomach pain, diarrhea and vomiting. Symptoms of a salmonella infection are similar but might also include a fever. With both illnesses, patients usually recover within a week.

How is the CENTRAL idea developed in this paragraph?

- (A) by arguing that salmonella infections are even worse than *E. coli* infections
- (B) by showing that eating contaminated raw cookie dough can be a deadly mistake
- (C) by explaining in more detail what can happen if people eat contaminated raw cookie dough
- (D) by demonstrating that most people that eat raw cookie dough will vomit and get a fever

3 The CDC believes that eating raw cookie dough represents too high a risk to be worth engaging in.

Which of the following BEST explains how Brian Zikmund-Fisher's perspective is different?

- (A) Zikmund-Fisher believes that there is little risk in eating cookie dough prepared with regular eggs.
- (B) Zikmund-Fisher believes that there is little risk in eating cookie dough prepared with pasteurized eggs.
- (C) Zikmund-Fisher believes that raw flour represents a greater threat to people's health than raw eggs.
- (D) Zikmund-Fisher believes that pasteurized eggs represent a greater threat to people's health than raw flour.

4 What is the author's purpose for writing this article?

- (A) to describe the message of a public health campaign and a few reactions to it
- (B) to highlight some of the biggest health hazards people will face this holiday season
- (C) to argue that eating raw cookie dough is not as dangerous as some people believe it is
- (D) to demonstrate how important it is for people to wash their hands when handling raw cookie dough

Answer Key

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 - (A) The mixing bowl, still coated with the sugary sweet dough, is calling your name.
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