



## Media Release

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### Unpasteurized Cider and Juice May Contain E. coli

In the past few years, outbreaks of *Escherichia coli* (*E. coli*) 0157:H7 have been linked to the consumption of un-pasteurized apple cider and other unpasteurized juices. An outbreak of *E. coli* 0157 occurred in central Ontario in the fall of 1998, and the most likely source was a batch of non-commercial, custom pressed apple cider.

*E. coli* 0157 is a strain of common intestinal bacteria that produces a potent toxin. The toxin can cause serious illness in anyone, but particularly children, the elderly and those with weak immune systems. Symptoms of *E. coli* 0157 infection include stomach cramps, vomiting and diarrhea that may become bloody. Severe disease can lead to kidney damage and in some cases, death. Illness occurs within two to ten days of consuming contaminated food or drink.

Apple cider can become contaminated with *E. coli* if apples are allowed to come in contact with fecal material. This could occur at a farm if apples are picked from the ground where livestock have been allowed to roam. A small amount of feces on a few apples is thought to be enough to contaminate a whole batch of cider. As well, subsequent batches produced from the same press could become contaminated if the press is not sanitized between batches.

The majority of juice sold in Canada is pasteurized. This includes all bottled, canned, boxed or concentrated juices displayed on supermarket shelves. Juice or cider sold in refrigerated displays or in produce sections of the grocery store, at roadside stands, or farm markets or fairs may or may not have been pasteurized. Consumers should check the label or ask the retailer to be sure.

The Canadian Food Inspection Agency has a *Code of Practice for the Production and Distribution of Unpasteurized Apple and Other Fruit Juice/Cider* which sets out good manufacturing practices, and suggests that products be labeled as unpasteurized. As this Code is not a regulation, producers do not have to follow it, nor is there a mechanism for enforcement of these standards.

The Canadian Institute of Public Health Inspectors has corresponded with the Government of Ontario to advocate for mandatory pasteurization of these products to reduce the risk of *E. coli* to consumers. The Institute calls upon all provincial governments and the federal government to adopt the Code of Practice as a regulatory requirement. In the absence of mandatory pasteurization it is necessary to caution those at high risk to avoid these products.

