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Raw Dough - Safe to Eat?

Do you eat raw dough while making cookies? Do you let the kids lick the beaters? Do your kids use raw dough to make ornaments or homemade "play clay"? Do you eat at restaurants that give kids raw dough to play with while waiting for your meal?

If you answered YES to any of these questions, you could

have a problem. According to Jenny Scott, a senior advisor in FDA's Center for Food safety and Applied Nutrition, eating any type of raw dough or batter could make you sick. She also advises against making and giving your children homemade dough to be used for "flour crafts". Read on to find out why.

The Culprit

Most think the danger from eating raw dough is the eggs. But an additional risk comes from the flour.

"Flour is derived from a grain that comes directly from the field and typically is not treated to kill bacteria," says Leslie Smoot, Ph.D., a senior advisor in FDA's Office of Food Safety and a specialist in the microbiological safety of processed foods. So if an animal heeds the call of nature in the field, bacteria from the animal waste could contaminate the grain, which is then harvested

and milled into flour.

Common "kill steps" applied during food preparation and/or processing (so-called because they kill bacteria that cause infections) include boiling, baking, roasting, microwaving, and frying. But with raw dough, no kill step has been used.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration, along with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and state and local officials, is investigating an outbreak of infections from eating raw dough. Dozens of people across the country have been sickened by a strain of bacteria called Shiga toxin-producing E. coli 0121.

Symptoms and Who is at Risk

Common symptoms for Shiga toxin-producing *E. coli* are diarrhea (often bloody) and abdominal cramps. Most people recover within a week. Some illnesses last longer and can be more severe, resulting in a type of kidney failure called hemolytic uremic syndrome (HUS). HUS can occur in people of any age, but is most common in young children

Let your daycare center know the dangers of playing with raw dough.

under five years, older adults and people with weakened immune systems.

If you have young children in daycare, check to see if they use homemade play clay. Even if children are not eating the dough, they are often putting their hands in their mouth after handling the dough.

Safe Handling of Foods

Food and Drug Administration (FDA) offers these tips for safe food handling to keep you and your family healthy:

- Do not eat any raw cookie dough, cake mix, batter, or any other raw dough or batter product that is supposed to be cooked or baked.
- Follow package directions for cooking products containing flour at proper temperatures and for specified times.
- Wash hands, work surfaces, and utensils thoroughly after contact with flour and raw dough products.
- Keep raw foods separate from other foods while preparing them to prevent any contamination that may be present from spreading. Be aware that flour may spread easily due to its powdery nature.
- Follow label directions to chill products containing raw dough promptly after purchase until baked.

