Doctors Warn: Trendy “Raw Water” Can Put People at Risk for Hepatitis

Drinking untreated water has been linked to hepatitis A, salmonella, E. coli, giardia and other dangerous diseases.

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Last week, The New York Times issued a report about a new fad called the “raw water” movement, the followers of which choose to drink untreated water for its alleged health and taste benefits. In response, doctors across the United States are warning that the practice may be putting people at risk for hepatitis A virus (HAV) and other dangerous diseases, Newsweek reports.

Currently, tap water in the United States goes through several stages of decontamination and processing, as detailed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). This includes steps such as coagulation, flocculation and sedimentation to remove dirt from the water supply as well as filtration and several disinfection processes to eliminate dangerous bacteria and parasites. Substances such as fluoride are typically added in as well to help keep people’s teeth healthy.

Thus, when news reports first came out last week that people are now choosing to buy water that has not undergone this process, doctors immediately took to social media to debunk the trend. For instance, the CDC reported that even with all these processes, the top 10 outbreaks linked to public water systems included hepatitis A, salmonella, E. coli, giardia and norovirus. These diseases are also linked to well water, which does not go through municipal water treatment plants.

Doctors also warn that the risk of water-borne illnesses from untreated water is a serious matter. In 2011, more than 100 people were infected with norovirus after drinking so-called raw water at a campsite in New Mexico, and in 2012, at least 21 people got giardia from an untreated spring at a camp in Alaska.

Numerous studies also show that most tap water across the country is just as safe as both filtered and bottled water. And although several recent reports have detailed illness caused by contaminated public water supplies (most notably, in Flint, Michigan), most experts agree that filtered water is still the best bet for healthy hydration.

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