One of the reasons milk and dairy products are considered wholesome is because they're healthy and safe. There's a reason for this—it's called pasteurization. Remember Louis Pasteur—the chemist who, in 1862, discovered a breakthrough process that helped prevent nasty diseases brought about by micro-organisms, i.e., germs, such as typhoid, diphtheria, scarlet fever and Q fever. By heating food, such as milk, for a brief period of time the germs are reduced or destroyed.

Recently, three downstate Michigan women became very ill from drinking raw, unpasteurized milk. They belonged to a "cow-share," where people own shares of cows in exchange for raw milk products.

It sounds organic and natural, wholesome even, but Pasteur would call it foolish. The micro-organisms that cause Q fever are found in infected animals' feces, milk, urine and other fluids. It causes acute and chronic illness. In the case of the Michigan women, one required prolonged hospitalization for Q fever meningitis.

The milk sold by cow share programs is not regulated, and is not sold in retail stores. The potential health risks associated with unpasteurized products are serious.

In our enlightened, 21st century society, it's alarming that some diseases, which men and women like Pasteur dedicated their lives and talents to finding cures and prevention for, are creeping back into our lives. Diseases like tuberculosis, whooping cough--parents choosing not to immunize their children are inviting them back into our society.

It's a free country, and you can make that choice, as well as that of consuming unpasteurized foods, but why take the chance?

--Marian Volek