Baking with Flour

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Christmas Cookies! Who’s ready for Christmas Cookies? It’s that time of year to get the rolling pin, cookie cutters and sprinkles out to make those “melt-in-the-mouth” cookies. One of my favorite family memories is making sugar cookies with my kids. Flour all over the kitchen, what a mess, but what fun.

The FDA published a consumer update warning against consuming raw dough, but not for the reason you may think. While the risk of salmonella from eggs exists, the risk of E. coli from flour is the reason for the FDA’s warning. It’s not very often that flour is the culprit of a food recall, and many raw flour products are generally viewed as safe.

Dr. Londa Nwadike, assistant professor and extension food safety specialist at Kansas State University and the University of Missouri, warns that no-bake treats are not an exception. “Any raw flour, regardless of the brand, could potentially contain pathogens,” explains Dr. Nwadike. “This was true in the past and is still true today. Remember, that anything with flour in it that has not been baked could potentially make people sick.”

Ready-to-bake store-bought cookie dough is also at risk. “That dough was not intended to be consumed raw, so it should be cooked for safety,” Dr. Nwadike says. According to Dr. Nwadike, products that contain cookie dough in a ready-to-eat state, like cookie dough ice cream, have been heat-treated before being sold and are therefore safe to consume. While there’s always a risk when consuming raw dough, kids under the age of five, older adults and people with weakened immune systems are at a higher risk for E. coli infection. “Kids are generally more susceptible to foodborne illness as their immune systems aren’t as developed,” explains Dr. Nwadike. “They may be more likely to put their hands in their mouth after touching raw flour.”

Here are five tips to help keep you safe while baking:
1. Wash your hands often and use clean towels
2. Keep your countertops clean
3. Don’t leave eggs out for more than two hours
4. Don’t eat raw cookie dough or cake batter
5. Keep flour in a food-safe container

The holidays bring the joy of time with family and friends. It is important to handle cookie dough safely to not spoil holiday fun. Resist the temptation to lick your fingers or sample the cookie dough! The risk of foodborne illness is present when dough is consumed raw. As much as you may enjoy eating raw cookie dough, you should avoid the temptation to prevent potential foodborne illness.

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