How risky is eating red meat? New papers provoke controversy

By CANDICE CHOI
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NEW YORK — Eating red meat is linked to cancer and heart disease, but are the risks big enough to give up burgers and steak?

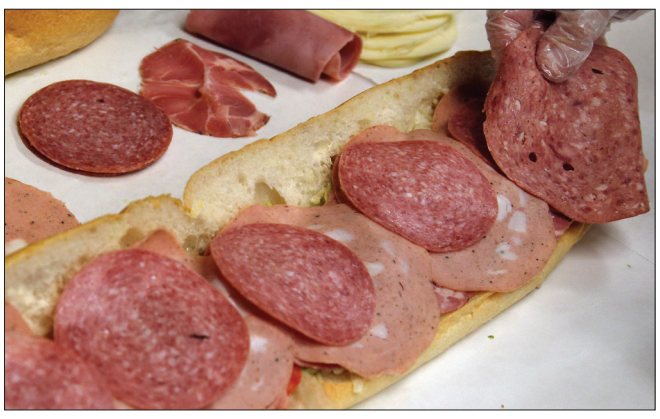
A team of international researchers says probably not, contradicting established advice. In a series of papers published Monday, the researchers say the increased risks are small and uncertain and that cutting back likely wouldn't be worth it for people who enjoy meat.

Their conclusions were swiftly attacked by a group of prominent U.S. scientists who took the unusual step of trying to stop publication until their criticisms were addressed.

The new work does not say red meat and processed meats like hot dogs and bacon are healthy or that people should eat more of them. The reviews of past studies generally support the ties to cancer, heart disease and other bad health outcomes. But the authors say the evidence is weak, and that there's not much certainty meat is really the culprit, since other diet and lifestyle factors could be at play.

Most people who understand the magnitude of the risks would say "Thanks very much, but I'm going to keep eating my meat," said co-author Dr. Gordon Guyatt of McMaster University in Canada.

It's the latest example of how divisive nutrition research has become, with its uncertainties leaving the door open for conflicting advice. Critics say findings often aren't backed by strong evidence. Defenders counter that nutrition studies can rarely be conclusive because of the difficulty of measuring the effects of any single food, but that methods have improved.



AP Photo/Elise Amendola, File

In this June 5, 2014, file photo, a man makes a submarine sandwich with mortadella, cooked salami, ham, Genoa salami and sweet capicola at a delicatessen in Massachusetts.

"What we need to do is look at the weight of evidence — that's what courts of law use," said Dr. Walter Willett, a professor of nutrition at Harvard University who was among those calling for the papers' publication to be postponed.

Willett, who has led studies tying meat to bad health outcomes, also said the reviews do not consider the particularly pronounced benefits of switching from red meat to vegetarian options.

The journal, Annals of Internal Medicine, defended the work and said the request to have it pulled before publication is not how scientific discourse is supposed to happen. Guyatt called the attempt to halt publication "silly."

In the papers, the authors sought to gauge the potential impact of eating less meat, noting the average of two to four servings a week eaten in North America and Western Europe. They said the evidence for cutting back wasn't compelling. For example, they found that cutting three servings of red meat a week would result in seven fewer cancer deaths per 1,000 people.

Based on the analyses, a panel of the international researchers said people do not have to cut back for health reasons. But they note their own advice is weak and that they didn't take into account other factors, such as animal welfare and the toll meat production has on the environment.

There was dissent even among the authors; three of the 14 panelists said they support reducing red and processed meats. A co-author of one review is also among those who called for a publication delay.

Those who pushed to postpone publication also questioned why certain studies were included or excluded in the reviews. Harvard's Dr. Frank Hu also noted that about a third of American adults eat at least one serving of red meat a day. He said the benefits of cutting back would be larger for those who eat such high amounts.

Still, other researchers not involved in the reviews have criticized nutrition science for producing weak and conflicting findings. Dr. John Ioannidis, a professor of medicine at Stanford University, said such advice can distract from clearer, more effective messages, such as limiting how much we eat.

As for his own diet, Guyatt said he no longer thinks red or processed meats have significant health risks. But he said he still avoids them out of habit, and for animal welfare and environmental reasons.

Cleanup: Pendleton Downtown Association raising money for those affected

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Stewart said he's still waiting to hear more information from local authorities to see how the fire will affect his business going forward.

"This too will pass," he said. "It won't just pass today."

The scene looked much more uncertain Sunday, when We Sell Stuff was engulfed in flames.

Store owner Greg Dixson opened We Sell Stuff in 2015 at 342 S.W. First St. On Sunday, he watched from the corner of Southwest First and Emigrant Avenue as black smoke billowed from the building and firefighters attacked the blaze.

Pendleton Assistant Fire Chief Shawn Penninger said a 911 caller at 1 p.m. reported seeing smoke drift out of the building. Pendleton Fire and Ambulance Services arrived moments later to find not only billowing smoke but an individual hanging from a second story window next to the air conditioner.

"The first arriving crew put up a ladder and took him out," Penninger said.

He also said the person declined medical help and took off, and the person's identity remains a mystery.

Dixson had said no one was in the building at the time, but he learned about the stranger from Penninger, who also reported the Umatilla County Sheriff's Office received a complaint on Aug. 29 about people possibly living in the building.

Dixson said the second story had an apartment, but he insisted no one lived there.

Staff photo by Kathy Aney

Firefighters attack a fire Sunday in the We Sell Stuff building on Southwest First Street in downtown Pendleton.

Yet, he also said he had a night watchman on duty.

Pendleton firefighters, with the assistance of several agencies, contained the blaze to the one building, but the effort continued well past 4 p.m. Penninger explained that was due to collapse of the roof, which shielded hot spots underneath.

Penninger added he would hand off the fire investigation to the Oregon State Fire Marshal, but Dixson said he knew the cause of the fire — "Electrical short behind my desk."

He revealed surveillance footage from inside the store showing a bright flash on a wall and flames.

Dixson, 68, said the business was the lone source of income for he and his two teen children.

"We were just starting to where we were making a profit," he said, and insurance was in the plans for next year.

He still has the moving van, he said, a couple of sheds worth of inventory, and a good relationship with the building's owner, Henry Lorenzen.

"He's the greatest guy in the world," he said. "I'll never find a landlord as good as him."

Still, Dixson said, he has no choice but to try and start over.

Contacted by phone, Lorenzen said he was in Portland Sunday and had been receiving reports from people in Pendleton.

He estimated the building has been in the family for more than 100 years and was sorry to see the building go. He also expressed sympathy for Dixson and said he would try to pick up the pieces when he returned to town on Monday.

Although the fire didn't spread beyond the confines We Sell Stuff, the effects of the smoke and the water runoff from the fire hoses were felt differently across the block.

Some businesses, like Main Street Diner and Alexander's Chocolate Classics, were already open Monday morning, other storefronts posted makeshift signs to inform their customers that their businesses were closed.

Although the back entrance to Pendleton Underground Tours' Cozy Rooms opens up to the blackened ruins of We Sell Stuff, Executive Director Brooke Armstrong said the nonprofit

Staff photo by Kathy Aney

Kevin Stewart, co-owner of Old School Shirt Makers New York on Main Street, rushed to move merchandise out of the store when a nearby business went up in flames on Sunday. On Monday, he said smoke damaged bolts of material and merchandise that couldn't be removed. The store will stay closed for the time being.

should only be closed for a couple of days.

As staff members mopped the hallways of the Cozy Rooms, she said the Tours' underground tunnels got no more water than they do during a rainstorm, although the cleanup effort meant the Pendleton Underground Tours lost out on some bus tours that were set to stop in town on Monday.

Armstrong anticipates the Pendleton Underground Tours will reopen on Wednesday, just in time for a reality show crew to come into town to film an episode for a show on paranormal buildings.

The Pendleton Air Museum at 21 S.W. Emigrant Ave. also intends to reopen on Wednesday, even though a hasty evacuation makes the storefront look like a ghost town.

Becky Dunlap, the vice president of the museum's board of directors, said museum volunteers and strangers off the street joined forces to quickly move out the museum's World War II memorabilia when the fate of the fire was still uncertain.

While there was some interruption to the museum's operations, Dunlap said the event will allow volunteers to do some housekeeping chores and brought some unintended publicity to the nonprofit.

But she also noted that some businesses took more significant damage than the museum.

On behalf of those businesses, the Pendleton Downtown Association started a fundraising page on Facebook with the goal of collecting $10,000 in donations. As of 5 p.m. Monday, the association had raised $395.

Vaping: Health Authority expects more reported cases

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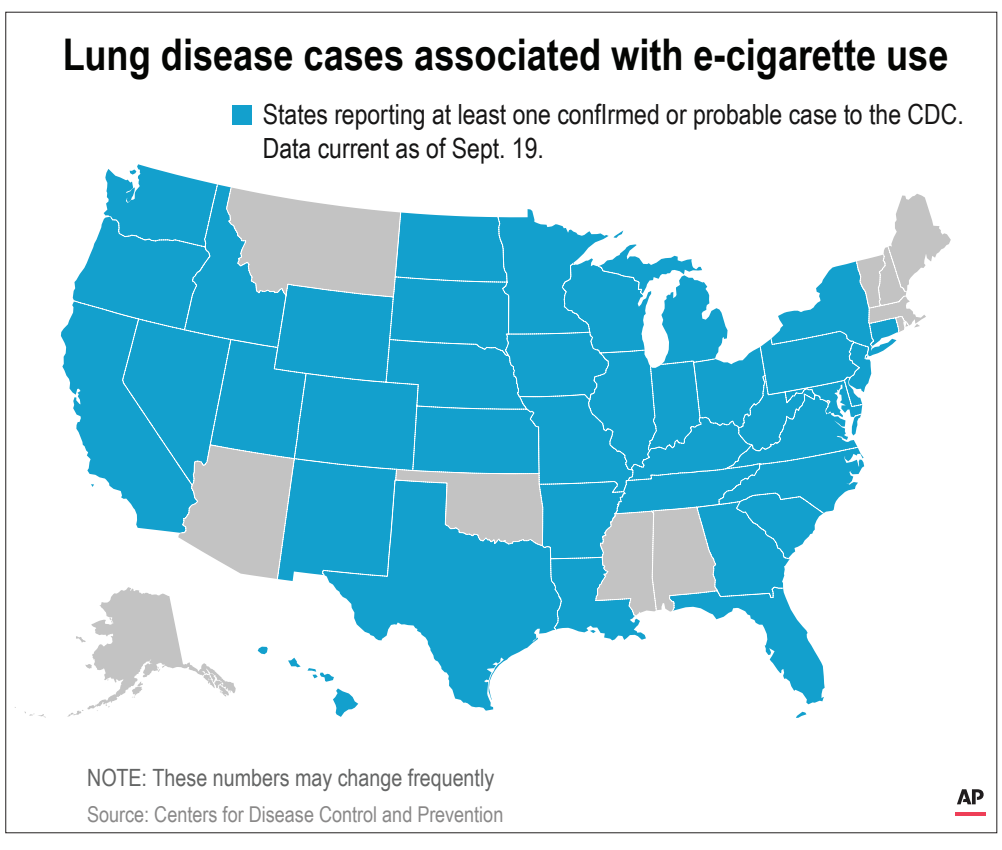
it with acute respiratory injuries and death. We do urge all individuals to stop vaping whether that's nicotine-based products, cannabis products or other. People who haven't vaped, shouldn't start."

State health officials identified five cases of acute respiratory illness related to vaping both nicotine-based products and cannabis products. The state's first death related to vaping was announced on Sept. 3.

According to Sidelinger, the five patients who were hospitalized reported shortness of breath and trouble breathing, which progressed. More than 800 cases of vaping-related illness have been reported across the nation. There have been a dozen deaths reported in several states.

"The latest individual who died, like the other case was an adult, and did report using cannabis products," said Sidelinger, who could not provide more detailed information about the victim.

Sidelinger said that all five of the people being treated for vaping-related illnesses had used licensed cannabis products. The Health Authority expects more cases to



be reported. The agency is working with the state and local officials to track the outbreak of vaping-related illnesses.

Multnomah County Deputy Health Officer Dr. Jennifer Vines said the county sent a clinician report to several hundred Portland-area health care providers echoing Sidelinger's warning. The county also urged people to quit vaping and asked health care providers to watch for more cases.

The warning came days after Multnomah County commissioners said the county would work with state and federal officials to ban the sale of flavored nicotine products.

House Republican leader Christine Drazan also issued a Sept. 26 statement saying that safeguarding public health was the state's top priority.

"I urge all Oregonians to take this advisory seriously and stop using vape products immediately until the Oregon Health Authority can properly investigate the risks," Drazan said.

Burke: CEO has seen transformation of the health care industry

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comes out — well intended — there is rarely an accurate calculation of how much it will cost to implement it," Burke said.

During his time at Good Shepherd, Burke has testified on those issues before the Oregon Legislature and Congressional committees. He said he doesn't see the United States going to a socialized, single-payer health care system — something he's "not a fan of" — but the country does need to continue to create solutions for increasing the affordability and availability of health care.

While rural hospitals struggle to retain staff, Burke said Good Shepherd has been more successful in recruiting and retaining providers in recent years.

"Obviously that's a benefit to the community, that we're getting the number of physicians we need," he said. "For many years we didn't have nearly enough, and now it's getting better. We grow our own, and that's helped."

It also helps that Good Shepherd has been named one of *The Oregonian's* top workplaces in Oregon multiple times. Burke said there are many reasons Good Shepherd is a great place to work, but its people definitely top the list.

Burke said he hadn't necessarily intended to spend so much of his career in Hermiston, but the community became home and he has "deeply loved" the work.

"The job is challenging, but I have enjoyed it immensely," he said.

Burke got his start in the health care industry in the 1960s, when his father, a hospital administrator, hired him as a janitor. Burke encouraged young people to consider a job in health care, calling it a fulfilling experience.

"It's a career that's not going away," he said. "Even though we don't know what changes the future holds for the industry, people will still need care."