



Raw Milk Facts

Factsheet 2015-10

FAQs

Frequently Asked Questions Raw Milk Safety and Risks

What is raw milk?

Raw or unpasteurized milk — sometimes called fresh milk or fresh unprocessed milk — is milk that comes directly from a cow's, goat's, sheep or other animal's udder, and is not pasteurized ("flash heated") to kill bacteria.

Raw milk, cheese, ice cream and other dairy products made from raw milk are claimed to be rich in fats and flavor. But, raw milk products carry a much higher risk of contamination with harmful bacteria that cause food-borne illness compared to pasteurized milk products. Young children, the elderly, and people with compromised immune systems, are more likely to suffer from permanent damage due to diseases spread by raw milk.

How does raw milk become contaminated?

Most of the bacteria in fresh milk from healthy animals are harmless. However, rapid changes in the health of a milk animal, or of the dairy farmer, or contaminants from polluted water, dirt, manure, vermin, air, cuts, and wounds, can make raw milk potentially dangerous if these factors introduce harmful bacteria into the milk.

Since milk is such a nutritionally complete food, it provides an excellent medium for growth of bacteria. Pathogens live in the intestines of animals and are released when an animal defecates. Contamination occurs when fecal matter gets into raw milk or the pipelines and other equipment used in production.

Licensing, government inspections, and testing of raw milk help monitor sanitation, but such actions are not a guarantee of safety.

Is raw milk safe?

Decades ago, before pasteurization of milk was mandated by government agencies, milk contaminated with harmful

bacteria was linked to several serious diseases including typhoid fever, diphtheria, septic sore throat, scarlet fever, dysentery, Q-fever, and other kinds of food-borne illness. Other diseases, including tuberculosis and undulant fever (brucellosis), can be transmitted to people in raw milk.

In addition to the hazards historically associated with raw milk, scientists and some unfortunate consumers, have recently become painfully aware of some new strains of harmful bacteria, called "emerging pathogens," which also can get into milk and make people sick — or even die.

They include *E. coli* 0157:H7, *Listeria monocytogenes*, *Salmonella typhimurium* DT-104, *Campylobacter jejuni*, and *Yersinia enterocolitica*. Some of these bacteria, such as *E. coli* 0157:H7, are particularly dangerous to young children, the elderly, and people with compromised immune systems.

These bacteria can cause death or serious, life-long adverse health conditions. Others, including *Salmonella typhimurium* DT-104, have shown alarming resistance to many commonly used antibiotics, so infections caused by these bacteria are difficult to treat.

Can drinking raw milk hurt me or my family?

According to the CDC, yes. Raw milk can cause serious infections. Raw milk and raw milk products (such as cheeses and yogurts made with raw milk) can be contaminated with bacteria that can cause serious illness, hospitalization, or death.

From 1998 through 2011, 148 outbreaks due to consumption of raw milk or raw milk products were reported to CDC. These resulted in 2,384 illnesses, 284 hospitalizations, and two deaths. Most of these illnesses were caused by *Escherichia coli*, *Campylobacter*,

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Salmonella, or Listeria. It is important to note that a substantial proportion of the raw milk-associated disease burden falls on children; among the 104 outbreaks from 1998-2011 with information on the patients' ages available, 82% involved at least one person younger than 20 years old.

Because not all cases of food-borne illness are recognized and reported, the actual number of illnesses associated with raw milk certainly is greater.

A research article about raw milk, "Increased Outbreaks Associated with Nonpasteurized Milk, United States, 2007-2012," is available online in the CDC journal *Emerging Infectious Diseases*:

http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/eid/article/21/1/14-0447_article

Is raw milk healthier than pasteurized milk?

Research has shown that there is no significant difference in the nutritional value of unpasteurized milk. Pasteurization will destroy some enzymes, but the enzymes that are naturally present in milk from cows, for example, are bovine enzymes. Human bodies do not use animal enzymes to help metabolize calcium and other nutrients.

I know people who have been drinking raw milk for years, and they never got sick. Why is that?

The presence of germs in raw milk is unpredictable. The number of disease-causing germs in the raw milk may be too low to make a person sick for a long time, and later high enough to make the same person seriously ill. For some people, drinking contaminated raw milk just once could make them really sick. Even if you trust the farmer and your store, raw milk is never a guaranteed safe product. Drinking raw milk means taking a real risk of getting very sick.

What are alternatives to raw milk?

There is a movement in the U.S. to consume organic, locally grown, unprocessed, more nutrient-dense foods. Some believe raw milk is more nutritious and provides the body "good bacteria." There are many other foods that contain "good bacteria" which are much less risky than raw milk. Many stores carry pasteurized yogurt and kefir with probiotics that are very safe to feed children. There are also high quality nutritional supplements that can be used to add probiotic bacteria into one's diet.

Is raw milk right for Nevada?

The State of Nevada joins the numerous other associations and agencies in warning consumers regarding the risk of raw milk consumption. It is overwhelmingly clear from scientific and epidemiological evidence that the risks of raw milk consumption far outweigh any perceived benefits. This risk is a particular concern for those who are at greater risk of illness from foodborne

CDC:

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pathogens (e.g., pregnant women, infants and children, the immunocompromised, and the frail and elderly).

Where can I find more information?

As a state agency, the Nevada Department of Agriculture recommends official, science-based organizations as sources of credible information. The following organizations have issued position statements about raw milk:

- American Academy of Pediatrics
- American Association of Public Health Veterinarians (AAPHV)
- American Medical Association
- Association of Food and Drug Officials (AFDO)
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
- Cornell University Food Science Department
- Dairy Processors of Canada
- Food and Drug Administration
- Health Canada
- International Association for Food Protection (IAFP)
- International Dairy Foods Association & National Milk Producers Federation
- Kentucky Association of Milk, Food, and Environmental Sanitarians
- National Environmental Health Association (NEHA)
- National Mastitis Council (NMC)
- North Carolina Association of Local Health Directors
- Vermont Veterinary Medical Association

Source: <http://www.realrawmilkfacts.com/position-statements>

Fact sheet source: CDC, <http://www.cdc.gov/foodsafety/rawmilk/raw-milk-index.html>