

Raw Milk in Nevada

Frequently Asked Questions



What is raw milk?

Raw or unpasteurized milk — also called fresh milk or fresh unprocessed milk — is milk that comes directly from a cow, goat, sheep or other animal's udder and is not pasteurized or 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. Harmful bacteria can cause food-borne illnesses in raw milk products as 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.

Is raw milk safe?

Decades ago, before pasteurization of milk was mandated, 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 through 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 raw milk. They include E. coli, Listeria, Salmonella, Campylobacter and Yersinia. Some of these, such as E. coli, 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, making infections caused by these bacteria difficult to treat.

Can drinking raw milk hurt me or my family?

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

From 2007 through 2012, 81 outbreaks due to consumption of raw milk or raw milk products were reported to CDC, resulting in 979 illnesses and 73 hospitalizations. Among the 81 outbreaks, 59 percent involved at least one person younger than five years old. From 1998-2011, 148 outbreaks resulted in 2,384 illnesses, 284 hospitalizations and two deaths.

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

"The average number of outbreaks caused by raw milk each year was four times higher from 2007-2012 than from 1993-2006."

-Center for Disease Control

Is raw milk legal in Nevada?

The sale of raw milk is illegal in 19 states. Raw milk sales are legal in Nevada, but currently consumers cannot purchase raw milk in the state. According to the National Conference of State Legislators, farmers must be certified by the county milk commission before they can receive a permit from the state dairy commission. If a permit is received, farmers can only sell milk in the county where they received the permit. Nye County is the only county with a county milk commission, has no raw milk dairies.

Is raw milk healthier than pasteurized milk?

Research has shown 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.

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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, the dairy farmer or contaminants from polluted water, dirt, manure, vermin, air, cuts and wounds can make raw milk dangerous if these factors introduce harmful bacteria into the milk.

Because milk is such a nutritionally complete food, it provides an excellent medium for growth of bacteria. Licensing, government inspections and testing of raw milk by the Nevada Department of Agriculture help monitor sanitation, but such actions are not a guarantee of safety.

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 very 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 illness or even death.

What are alternatives to raw milk?

There is a movement in the United States 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 these 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. High quality nutritional supplements can also be used to add probiotic bacteria into one's diet.

Is raw milk right for Nevada?

The state of Nevada joins numerous associations and agencies in warning consumers regarding the risk of raw milk consumption. Scientific and epidemiological evidence clearly shows 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 food-borne pathogens (pregnant women, infants and children, immunocompromised individuals and the elderly.)



Where can I find more information?

The following organizations have issued position statements about raw milk:

- American Academy of Pediatrics
- American Association of Public Health Veterinarians
- American Medical Association
- Association of Food and Drug Officials
- 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
- International Dairy Foods Association & National Milk Producers Federation
- Kentucky Association of Milk, Food, and Environmental Sanitarians
- National Environmental Health Association
- National Mastitis Council
- North Carolina Association of Local Health Directors
- Vermont Veterinary Medical Association

Sources:

- www.cdc.gov/foodsafety/rawmilk/raw-milk-index.html
- www.realrawmilkfacts.com/position-statements
- www.ncsl.org/documents/agri/raw-milk-state-laws.pdf#page=47