

The Facts About Raw Milk

Raw Milk: What Is It?

Raw milk is milk that has not been pasteurized. Pasteurization is a process where raw milk is heated to high temperatures. These high temperatures kill bacteria that can cause disease. Raw milk provides an ideal environment for bacteria to grow. Without pasteurization, harmful bacteria can grow in raw milk and potentially be a danger to anyone who drinks it.

Pasteurized Milk: Safe and Nutritious

Pasteurized milk is an important source of nutrients and for many people it is a regular part of the daily diet. Pasteurization does not appreciably alter the nutritive value of milk.

While some people believe that raw milk offers greater nutritional value than pasteurized milk, research indicates there is no significant difference. You should weigh any supposed health benefit against the overwhelming evidence that drinking raw milk can make you sick. Parents should consider that children are particularly at risk for infections from drinking raw milk, and make the safe choice to give them only pasteurized milk.

Looking back over our country's history, before pasteurization was introduced in the early 1900s, many people became ill and died as a result of drinking raw milk. While widespread pasteurization of milk has eliminated large outbreaks of milk-borne disease, today there are still cases where people become sick from drinking raw milk.

Raw Milk: Unsafe to Drink

Raw milk contains bacteria that may cause disease. The federal and provincial governments have passed laws making it illegal to sell or distribute unpasteurized milk to consumers. However, some people still choose to drink raw milk, believing that it is safe to drink raw milk from a farm which has high standards of cleanliness. But there is still a serious risk.

Cows naturally carry certain disease-causing bacteria which may be passed to the milk that they produce. The bacteria may not harm the cow, but humans consuming unpasteurized milk may become infected with a serious illness.

Raw Milk Linked with Many Diseases

While anyone can get sick from drinking raw milk, certain groups have a higher risk. Those more likely to become ill are babies, children, the elderly, and people with a chronic health condition or weakened immune systems. Children may be at higher risk because they have immature immune systems. Pregnant women are also at risk for miscarriage when exposed to some of the organisms typically transmitted by raw milk or some of its by-products.

Harmful bacteria in raw milk can lead to infections that cause severe diarrhea, cramps, fever, nausea, vomiting, headache, and dehydration, and they can also lead to life-threatening kidney failure, meningitis, miscarriage and death.

Here is a list of some of the infections and diseases that can be related to drinking raw milk:

Campylobacter infection
Salmonella infection
Yersiniosis
Listeria infection
Tuberculosis
Brucella infection
Staphylococcal enterotoxin poisoning
Streptococcal infections
E. coli O157:H7 infection
Toxoplasmosis
Gastroenteritis
Meningitis
Encephalitis
Septicemia
Endocarditis
Tissue abscesses

Take Care of Your Health

Milk and milk products sold in Canada must meet food safety requirements. Only buy pasteurized milk products from grocery stores or other reputable stores. Remember to store all dairy products at the proper temperature which is 4 degrees Celsius or lower.