

Raw Milk: A Risk to Public Health

Attention Consumers:

Do you drink raw milk - milk that has not been pasteurized to destroy germs that can make you sick? Milk is a highly perishable food product and is an excellent medium for transmitting a variety of diseases.

How is raw milk different than pasteurized milk?

Raw milk is unprocessed milk that is drunk just as it comes from the cow, goat or sheep.

Pasteurized milk, on the other hand, is heated to kill all disease-causing bacteria that may be found in raw milk.

Raw milk can make you sick

Raw milk usually comes from farms that have not been approved or inspected, and which are not monitored by government for drug residues such as antibiotics.

Some people say they grew up drinking raw milk and never became sick from it. However, public health authorities know of many cases where people got sick from drinking raw milk.

While mandatory pasteurization of milk has virtually eliminated large outbreaks of milk borne disease in Canada, occasional cases still remind us of the hazards of raw milk consumption.

For example:

..... In Chilliwack, 5 members of a family became ill with Salmonella from raw goat's milk.

..... On Central Vancouver Island, 9 out of 13 kindergarten children became ill with *Campylobacter* after drinking raw milk while on a school visit to a local farm.

..... In a separate outbreak, also on Central Vancouver Island, five children from different families were diagnosed with an infection of *E. coli* 0157:H7 after drinking raw goat's milk from the same farm. Two of the children had to be hospitalized. Samples of the raw goat's milk were

tested and found to have the same strain of *E. coli* 0157:H7 that caused the illnesses.

..... In Vernon, a number of cases of *Campylobacter* were traced to the consumption of raw milk.

..... In the Kootenays, a 35 year old woman needed surgery and a long stay in hospital due to *Brucella* infection. She had previously drunk raw milk from several sources.

..... On the Queen Charlotte Islands, 2 people developed *Toxoplasmosis* after drinking raw goat's milk.

Have you been told that raw milk is better than pasteurized milk?

There are a number of myths about this. For example...

Is raw milk better for you?

No. There is no evidence that raw milk is better for you than pasteurized milk.

Does pasteurized milk contain additives or preservatives?

By law, vitamins A and D must be added to pasteurized milk. Nothing else can be added to milk.

(Vitamin A helps you see better in dim light, and to tell colors apart. Vitamin D helps your body take up calcium, and reduces the risk of osteoporosis.)

Does raw milk help keep you from getting sick?

No. There is no evidence that raw milk makes you more resistant to disease.

Does raw milk help develop teeth better than pasteurized milk?

No. There is no evidence that raw milk helps your teeth develop any better than pasteurized milk.

What can you do to protect yourself?

- Anyone can get sick from the disease-causing agents, which may be found in raw milk. However, infants, children, the elderly, and people with certain chronic diseases are at more risk of getting sick from drinking raw milk because they are more vulnerable to infection. Infants and children are at even higher risk because they usually drink a lot of milk.
- Only buy your milk products from proper stores. Milk that you buy from grocery stores or other reputable commercial stores **must** be pasteurized and packaged in an approved dairy plant.

All milk sold in British Columbia must be pasteurized. That is the law!

Please Note:

If you live in a rural area of B.C. and cannot buy commercially pasteurized milk, you can follow this process for home pasteurization:

- First, disinfect the clean and empty milk bottles and tops by boiling in water for 10 minutes, or by putting them in a preheated oven for 20 minutes at 100° C (212° F).
- Place raw milk in the top part of a double boiler. Gradually raise the temperature of the milk to 63° C (145° F) or hotter and keep it at this temperature for at least 30 minutes. Stir often to prevent burning, and to keep the temperature even.
- Check the temperature of the milk often with a clean, reliable thermometer. Put the thermometer about 2/3 of the way into the milk (do not rest it on the side or the bottom of the container). If you find the temperature has fallen below 63° C (145° F), raise the temperature to 63° C (145° F) or hotter and start the 30 minute timing over again.
- Cool the pasteurized milk quickly by putting the top part of the double boiler in ice water. Stir often to make it cool off faster.

- Pour the cooled milk into the disinfected bottles and put them in the fridge at 4° C (40° F).

Pasteurized milk that is kept in the fridge should keep for up to two weeks.

NOTE: Do NOT use a microwave oven to pasteurize milk at home. You must use the method described above.

For more information on raw milk, please contact your local environmental health officer.

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- Deaf and hearing-impaired, call 1-866-889-4700
- Pharmacist available 5pm to 9am every day
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