

Milk Safety

Consumption of wholesome milk and dairy products is an important cornerstone for a balanced and healthy diet for all people, and it is especially important for children, pregnant women and the elderly. However, it is widely considered an unnecessary health risk to consume raw milk or milk that has not been pasteurized to kill harmful germs (bacteria, viruses and parasites). The role of pasteurization is to eliminate disease-causing germs that may have contaminated the milk and provide protection for consumers.



Many consumers may not fully understand the risk raw milk can pose. The risk is comparable to that of eating raw ground beef or raw ground poultry and, in many cases, the germs that are present are similar. The most common germs found in raw milk include *Listeria monocytogenes*, *Salmonella* spp., *Campylobacter jejuni*, *Yersinia enterocolitica*, *Escherichia coli* (*E. coli* O157-H7), and mastitis causing germs such as *Streptococcus aureus*. Some of these are found in the environment and/or in the feces of animals commonly used for milk. Germs may vary according to the time of year, geographic location, herd size, and farm management practices. Milk contamination may occur from the following:

- Cow feces coming into direct contact with the milk
- Infection of the cow's udder (mastitis)
- Cow diseases (e.g., bovine tuberculosis)
- Bacteria that live on the skin of cows
- Environment (e.g., feces, dirt, processing equipment)
- Contamination from insects, rodents, and other animal vectors
- Humans, for example, by cross-contamination from soiled clothing and boots

In February 2012, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) released a study that examined the number of dairy outbreaks in the United States between 1993 and 2006. The study showed that 60% of reported dairy-related outbreaks were linked to raw milk products. Three-quarters of these outbreaks occurred in states where the sale of raw milk was legal at the time. A review of data collected in Missouri from 2009-2011 (3 year period) showed 89 people reported illness associated with drinking raw milk or raw dairy products. Twelve of the 89 reported hospitalizations from their illness.

The risk of getting sick from drinking raw milk is greater for infants and young children, the elderly, pregnant women, and people with weakened immune systems than it is for healthy adults. However, it is important to remember that healthy people of any age can become seriously ill if they drink raw milk contaminated with disease causing germs. Pasteurization is the only way to kill disease causing bacteria in milk and provide a safe and healthy product for consumers.

For more information on raw milk and illness outbreaks associated to consuming raw milk visit:

www.cdc.gov/Features/RawMilk

www.cdc.gov/foodsafety/rawmilk/raw-milk-videos.html

www.cdc.gov/foodsafety/rawmilk/raw-milk-index.html