

“Got Raw Milk? Don’t Drink It!”



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Although many foods can be enjoyed raw, milk and products made from it should never be one of them. Raw milk, or milk that has not been pasteurized (heated to kill germs), is one of the riskiest sources of foodborne illness and can be contaminated with a variety of germs that can make people sick.

A new study by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) examined the number of dairy outbreaks in the United States during a 13-year period. Between 1993 and 2006, 60 percent of the 121 dairy-related outbreaks reported to CDC (73 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. Experts also found that raw milk led to much more severe illness and hospitalization than pasteurized milk. Young people under age 20 were disproportionately affected; this is especially troubling since children are more likely than adults to get seriously ill from the bacteria in raw milk.

Reported outbreaks represent the tip of the iceberg. Because not all people who get a foodborne illness seek healthcare, get their illness diagnosed, or get reported to public health officials, the actual number of illnesses associated with raw milk likely is much higher.

Even healthy adults can get sick from drinking raw milk. For some, getting sick from raw milk can mean diarrhea, stomach cramping, and vomiting, often for days. For others, it can mean kidney failure, paralysis, chronic disorders, and even death. No matter what precautions dairy farmers take, and even if laboratory tests for bacteria come back negative, they cannot guarantee that their unpasteurized milk, or products made from it are free of harmful germs. You can’t look at, smell, or taste a bottle of raw milk and tell if it is safe to drink.

As a consumer, you can take steps when grocery shopping and at home with all your dairy products to minimize the risk of getting sick:

- 1) Only consume pasteurized milk and milk products. Look for the word “pasteurized” on the dairy labels. If in doubt, ask!
- 2) Keep pasteurized dairy products refrigerated at 40 degrees Fahrenheit or below at home and dispose of any expired products to reduce the risk of illness.
- 3) If you consume soft, fresh, un-aged cheeses like queso fresco, make sure they are made from pasteurized milk. Aged cheeses made from raw milk are generally okay to eat because germs usually die off during the aging process. However, outbreaks associated with these cheeses have been identified.
- 4) Avoid raw milk, it's just not worth the risk.

To view the new study, please visit www.cdc.gov/eid. For more information about raw milk, visit:

<http://www.cdc.gov/foodsafety/rawmilk/raw-milk-index.html>, and

<http://www.accessdata.fda.gov/scripts/cdrh/cfdocs/cfcfr/CFRSearch.cfm?CFRPart=133>