

Frequently asked questions

Unpasteurised (raw) cow's milk

What is raw milk?

Raw milk, also known as unpasteurised milk, is milk that has not been pasteurised to kill harmful organisms.

How does raw milk become contaminated?

Raw milk becomes contaminated either directly, from infection of the udder, or indirectly, from contact with cow faeces or other contaminants introduced during milking.

No matter how good milking hygiene practices are, it is impossible to ensure that raw milk is free from harmful organisms.

What are the risks associated with drinking raw milk?

Consuming raw milk can expose you to harmful organisms that can cause symptoms ranging from mild discomfort, diarrhoea and vomiting to life-threatening illnesses such as listeriosis or haemolytic uraemic syndrome (HUS). These can result in renal failure or even death in previously healthy people.

Who is at risk from consuming raw milk?

Everyone is vulnerable to illness caused by the harmful organisms that may be in raw milk. However, the risks are even greater for young children, the elderly, pregnant women, people with underlying health problems and those who are immunosuppressed.

What are the illnesses associated with raw milk?

Raw milk can be a source of harmful organisms such as [*E.coli*](#), [*Salmonella*](#), [*Campylobacter*](#), [*Listeria*](#) and [*Cryptosporidium*](#).

[*E.coli*](#), [*Salmonella*](#), [*Campylobacter*](#) and [*Cryptosporidium*](#) infection can cause mild to severe gastroenteritis. Sometimes extremely severe complications such as [*haemolytic uraemic syndrome \(HUS\)*](#) occur. HUS can result in kidney (renal) failure and death in previously healthy people.

[*Listeria*](#) infection is particularly serious in pregnant women and can result in miscarriage or stillbirth of babies.

How is milk treated to be safe?

Milk is highly perishable and is an ideal place for harmful organisms to grow enough to cause disease.

To make it safe, raw milk goes through a process called pasteurisation. This process usually involves heating milk to a specific temperature for a certain period of time to kill any harmful organisms that can be present in milk.

How do I know that I am drinking pasteurised milk?

It is illegal to sell raw milk for human consumption in Australia, so all bottled milk you buy from a shop, or you get from a food business like a cafe, must be pasteurised. Any business that sells or serves raw cow's milk is breaching the law AND putting your health at risk.

Does pasteurisation affect the nutritional quality of milk?

The nutrient value of milk is generally unaffected by pasteurisation. Vitamin C is the most heat sensitive vitamin and pasteurisation results in a small loss of vitamin C. However, in terms of a healthy diet, this loss is not significant as milk is not a major source of vitamin C.

What about raw milk cheeses?

Raw milk cheeses for human consumption must be approved by Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ). The maturation of the cheese must meet certain time, temperature and water content requirements to ensure it is safe to eat.

What about raw goat's milk?

Raw goat's milk is allowed to be sold in South Australia under strict conditions including testing, appropriate recall procedures, and labelling. The statement '**Caution— This milk is an unpasteurised product and may contain organisms that could be injurious to health**' is required to be included on the product.

What about raw milks for cosmetic use? E.g. bath milks

Raw milk products labelled as bath milk for 'cosmetic use only' should only be sold as a cosmetic product. Consumers are urged to only use products for the intended purpose and not consume raw milk products because this is unsafe.

What about the product for sale called 'Cold Pressed Raw Milk'?

This product is made in New South Wales and has been approved by the New South Wales Food Authority. It has undergone a process equivalent to pasteurisation which involves very high pressure that will kill the organisms that cause illness. It is not really 'raw' milk.

But I was brought up on a farm and drank raw milk without getting sick?

The presence of harmful organisms in raw milk is unpredictable. People can drink it for a long time without getting sick, and then get sick if their milk is contaminated.

Any additional time between milking the cow and drinking the milk gives harmful organisms time to grow so it is recommended that people with their own cows heat treat the milk before consuming.

Other countries allow the sale of raw milk, why is it illegal to sell raw milk to drink in Australia?

FSANZ conducted a risk assessment in 2009 concluding that the risks from raw milk were too great to consider changing or removing processing requirements in the Food Standards Code. This code requires that milk is pasteurised (or equivalently processed) to eliminate disease-causing organisms that may be present.

While some other countries may allow it, these countries have a higher prevalence of outbreaks caused by raw milk. For example, 20 states in the United States of America (USA)

allow some type of raw milk sale for direct human consumption. Outbreaks of illness from these 20 states accounted for 80% of all outbreaks in the USA during this period.

For more information

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