

Raw Milk Fact Sheet

Raw milk is milk that has not been pasteurized before consumption. The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) recommend drinking only pasteurized milk, because raw milk may contain harmful bacteria such as E. Coli O157:H7, Listeria and Salmonella that can cause life-threatening illnesses. This recommendation has been affirmed by the American Medical Association and the American Academy of Pediatrics, among others.

Raw Milk and the Law

Because of these health concerns, it is a violation of federal law to sell raw milk across state lines that has been packaged for consumer use. However, raw milk regulations vary by state, and some states allow the sale of raw milk within their borders. This means that in some states¹, raw milk may be sold to local retail food stores or directly from the farm to consumers.

The Importance of Pasteurization

Despite repeated health warnings, the Centers for Disease Control identified 45 outbreaks of foodborne illness that implicated raw milk or cheese made from raw milk between 1998 and May 2005. These outbreaks accounted for 1,007 illnesses, 104 hospitalizations and two deaths. (CDC Morbidity Weekly Report, March 2, 2007.)

Pasteurization is a simple, effective method to kill the harmful pathogens found in raw milk. Since its introduction more than a century ago, pasteurization has been recognized around the world as an essential tool for ensuring that milk and dairy products are safe. During pasteurization, the temperature of milk is raised to at least 161 degrees Fahrenheit for more than 15 seconds, and then rapidly cooled. In addition to helping extend milk's shelf-life, many harmful bacteria are destroyed, including Salmonella, Campylobacter and Listeria. Because of pasteurization, less than 1.5 percent of annual foodborne illness outbreaks in the United States involve dairy foods².

Nutritional Value and Safety

There is no scientific evidence to suggest that there is any meaningful difference in the nutritional value of pasteurized and unpasteurized milk². In addition, vitamin D, which is not found in significant amounts in raw milk, is added to processed milk, making it an even more nutritious product. Vitamin D insufficiency and deficiency is a common problem in the United States affecting many Americans, especially those of Hispanic or African American descent. The addition of vitamin D makes pasteurized milk an excellent source of this essential nutrient providing 25% of the daily value in one 8 ounce serving.

¹ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Public Health Service, Food and Drug Administration. *Grade "A" Pasteurized Milk Ordinance...2001 Revision*. No. 229. Washington, D.C.: USDHHS, PHS, FDA. May 15, 2002. <http://www.cfsan.fda.gov/~acrobat/pmo01.pdf>

² U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, U.S. Food and Drug Administration, Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition, *Sale/consumption of raw milk-position statement (M-1-03-4)*. March 19, 2003. <http://www.cfsan.fda.gov/~ear/mi-03-4.html>

Dairy products are among the most tested and regulated foods in this country. In addition to the extensive and rigorous safety and quality tests that dairy foods go through before they reach the grocery store, dairy farms and plants must meet stringent federal and local regulations, including those developed by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, FDA and state regulatory agencies.

Additional Resources:

- Dairy Farming Today
www.dairyfarmingtoday.org
- FDA Consumer Magazine Article on Raw Milk
www.fda.gov/fdac/features/2004/504_milk.html
- USDA Food Safety Research Information Office
http://fsrio.nal.usda.gov/document_reslist.php?product_id=142
- Modern Dairy Farming Practices and Milk Quality: Myths and Facts, Dairy Council Digest, May/June, 2007 www.nationaldairyCouncil.org/NR/rdonlyres/AA72A4E1-8BC2-428B-BDD3-16E6DA484ABD/0/dcd783.pdf