

Risks associated with consuming raw (unpasteurised) milk

Raw milk is milk that has not been pasteurised to kill bacteria that could be harmful to humans. No matter how carefully it has been produced, raw milk may be unsafe.

It is important that consumers understand the risks associated with drinking raw milk and balance this risk against the claimed 'benefits'.

If you drink raw milk it increases your risk of acquiring various gastrointestinal illnesses, including those caused by microorganisms (bacteria, bugs, or germs) such as *Salmonella spp.*, *pathogenic E. coli*, *Staphylococcus aureus*, *Campylobacter jejuni*, and *Listeria monocytogenes*.

Consumers exposed to these organisms may experience symptoms which can range from mild discomfort (diarrhoea and vomiting) to life-threatening illnesses such as listeriosis or haemolytic uraemic syndrome (HUS) which can result in renal failure in otherwise healthy people.

For more information on the risks, read the [risk assessment of raw cow milk](#) published by Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ).

How does raw milk become contaminated?

There are various ways by which raw milk may become contaminated with microorganisms.

The farm environment is a reservoir for disease-causing bacteria, some of which may be shed directly into the milk from a cow or goat, especially if the animal has a disease such as mastitis. Bacteria may also contaminate milk during the milking process, or during transport, processing, packaging, and storage. Poor hygiene practices increase the risks.

Farmers adhering to good hygienic practices during milking may reduce, but will not completely eliminate the risk of



contamination. So, no matter what precautions are taken by the farmer, they cannot guarantee their milk will always be free from harmful bacteria. Plus, it is neither practical nor effective to perform laboratory tests on raw milk to determine if it is free from all disease-causing bacteria.

Is the sale of raw milk and raw milk products legal in Australia?

In Australia, the sale of raw cow's milk for human consumption is illegal. In Victoria it is also illegal to package, deliver or provide raw milk for consumption.

What is cosmetic or bath milk?

Raw milk is sometimes labelled and sold as 'cosmetic milk' or 'bath milk'. While the sale of these cosmetic products is not illegal, they should be clearly labelled to alert consumers they are '**not for human consumption**'. Sometimes this labelling is not prominent.

Have we had illnesses in Australia after consumption of raw milk?

Data published for the period 1998 to 2003, showed there were eight outbreaks (with over 100 cases of illness) linked to the consumption of raw cow's milk in Australia. Four outbreaks were a result of drinking raw milk on school camps, while other outbreaks implicated a community setting, a school, and unpasteurised milk consumption on farms.

Who is at risk from consuming raw milk?

Everyone is vulnerable to illness caused by organisms that may be present in raw milk. However, the risks are even greater for young children and for people who are elderly, have underlying health problems, are immunocompromised, or are pregnant.

What is pasteurisation?

Since the 1940s it has been compulsory to pasteurise cow's milk in Australia. Pasteurisation involves heating milk for a short period of time. Usually milk is heated to 72°C for 15 seconds. This process is very effective in destroying any disease-causing bacteria that may be present in raw milk, and renders the final product safe for human consumption.

Pasteurisation is a perfectly simple and straightforward process, and results in a product that is safe and suitable for all consumers.

Does pasteurisation affect the nutritional quality of raw milk?

It has been claimed that pasteurisation destroys some of the beneficial components of raw milk. There is no substantiated evidence to suggest there is any significant difference at all in the nutritional status of pasteurised or unpasteurised milk. Likewise, there is no credible scientific evidence to show raw milk confers additional health benefits for consumers.

In contrast, there is repeated evidence that raw milk represents a substantial risk of foodborne illness. Unfortunately, many of the campaigners for raw milk promote the unsubstantiated health benefits of raw milk.

How can I get beneficial bacteria into my diet?

If you were thinking about drinking raw milk because you believe it is a good source of beneficial bacteria, you need to know that it is **not**. In fact you may become ill from harmful bacteria that can contaminate raw milk.

Various types of yoghurt and other fermented products, such as kefir, made from **pasteurised** milk can be a good source of probiotic bacteria.



Batch pasteurisation vat

What is the food regulators perspective?

Dairy Food Safety Victoria believes that the health risks associated with consuming raw milk and many raw milk products are significant. Consumers are strongly advised to only consume pasteurised milk and other dairy products made from pasteurised milk.

The Chief Scientist of Food Standards Australia New Zealand states "*raw milk risks are too great*" and "*even extremely good hygiene procedures won't ensure dangerous pathogens aren't present in raw milk.*"

This position aligns with medical authorities (American Medical Association, American Academy of Pediatrics) and warnings issued by international regulatory agencies that oversee food safety. These agencies include the [United States Food and Drug Administration](#), [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#), and [Health Canada](#), as well as the [International Association for Food Protection](#).

**Drinking raw milk increases the risk of contracting serious foodborne illnesses.
Only consume pasteurised milk!**

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