

Unpasteurized (Raw) Milk

What is unpasteurized (raw) milk?

Raw milk is milk that has not been pasteurized or [homogenized](#). **Pasteurization** is a process which retards microbial growth in foods. The pasteurization process uses heat to destroy harmful bacteria without significantly changing milk's nutritional value or flavor. In addition to killing disease-causing bacteria, pasteurization destroys bacteria that cause spoilage, extending the shelf life of milk.

Why is the consumption of raw milk harmful?

Raw milk may harbor a host of disease-causing organisms (pathogens), such as the bacteria campylobacter, Escherichia, listeria, salmonella, yersinia, and brucella. More than 300 people in the United States got sick from drinking raw milk or eating cheese made from raw milk in 2001, and nearly 200 became ill from these products in 2002, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

How does unpasteurized milk become contaminated?

Milk can become contaminated on the farm when animals shed bacteria into the milk. Cows, goats, and sheep carry bacteria in their intestines that do not make them sick but can cause illness in people who consume their untreated milk or milk products. Cows can pick up pathogens from the environment just by lying down--giving germs the opportunity to collect on the udder, the organ from which milk is secreted.

What are the symptoms of foodborne illness from raw milk?

Common symptoms of foodborne illness from many of these types of bacteria include diarrhea, stomach cramps, fever, headache, vomiting, and exhaustion. Most healthy people recover from foodborne illness within a short period of time, but others may have symptoms that are chronic, severe, or life-threatening. People with weakened immune systems, such as elderly people, children, and those with certain diseases or conditions, are most at risk for severe infections from pathogens that may be present in raw milk. In pregnant women, *Listeria monocytogenes*-caused illness can result in miscarriage, fetal death, or illness or death of a newborn infant. And *Escherichia coli* infection has been linked to hemolytic uremic syndrome, a condition that can cause kidney failure and death.

Is there a law regarding the sale of unpasteurized milk?

It is a violation of federal law enforced by the FDA to sell raw milk packaged for consumer use across state lines (interstate commerce). But each state regulates the sale of raw milk within the state (intrastate), and some states allow it to be sold. This means that in some states dairy operations may sell it to local retail food stores, or to consumers directly from the farm or at agricultural fairs or other community events, depending on the state law. To find out your state's policies regarding the sale of raw milk, contact your state health department official. [Click here](#) for the state of Texas' policy on the sale of raw milk.

How do I avoid foodborne illness associated with unpasteurized milk?

Do not drink raw (unpasteurized) milk or eat foods that contain unpasteurized milk. Do not eat soft cheese such as Feta, Brie, and Camembert cheeses, blue-veined cheeses, queso blanco, queso fresco, and Panela unless they are labeled as made with pasteurized milk.

Local Findings

Unpasteurized milk has been found for sale at a local certified farmer's market in the City of Houston. These products may also be found in health food stores. **REMEMBER:** the sale of unpasteurized milk is illegal. If you see or know of an individual or establishment selling raw milk, please contact the Houston Department of Health and Human Services at (713) 794-9200 or go to houstontx.gov and complete a [Complaint Intake Form](#).

[The Raw Milk Movement: Healthy or Hazardous?](#)

More and more people see the advantages in drinking untreated, unprocessed, unpasteurized milk. [Click here to read more.](#)

Sources

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
U.S. Food & Drug Administration
Indiana State Board of Animal Health