

Raw Milk Consumption

FARM ANIMAL FIELD SERVICES

Consuming liquid milk or products made from raw milk such as soft cheese, ice cream, and yogurt can pose severe health risks, including death. Raw milk that has not undergone a process known as pasteurization can contain harmful bacteria such as *Brucella*, *Campylobacter*, *Listeria*, *Mycobacterium bovis* (Bovine Tuberculosis), *Coxiella burnetti* (Q-fever), *Salmonella*, and *E. coli*. Pasteurization is the process of briefly heating milk to destroy harmful bacteria without changing or adulterating the milk. Even though an animal appears to be healthy, this does not mean that the milk is free of harmful organisms. Systemically healthy animals can carry these organisms that contaminate milk and put the consumer at risk.

Milk contamination may occur from:

- Animal feces coming into direct contact with the milk
- Infection of the animal's udder (mastitis)
- Ruminant diseases (bovine tuberculosis, brucellosis, listeriosis, and others)
- Bacteria found on skin of cows
- Environment (feces, dirt, equipment)
- Insects, rodents, and other animals
- Humans, for example, by cross-contamination from soiled hands and clothing

Pasteurization is the process of heating milk to a designated temperature for a duration of time to kill illness-causing bacteria present in the milk.

Pasteurization is the only way to kill many of the bacteria in milk that can make you and your family ill. Dairy farms that take the greatest precautions and perform good hygiene and sanitation protocols can still have bacteria in their milk which may lead to illnesses. Each batch of a farm's raw milk may be different from the last. **If tests come back negative from a single batch, there is no guarantee that the next batch will be free of harmful bacteria.** Currently, in the state of Tennessee it is illegal for a dairy farmer to sell raw, unpasteurized milk to the public for human consumption.

Raw milk offers no health benefits as compared with drinking pasteurized milk, and many studies have shown that pasteurization does not change the nutritional value of milk and dairy products. The risks of drinking raw milk far outweigh any possible benefits. The risk of becoming ill from drinking raw milk is greater for infants and young children, the elderly, pregnant women, and people with weakened immune systems such as those with cancer or HIV/AIDS. It is important to remember that healthy people of any age can get very sick or even die by drinking raw milk contaminated with harmful bacteria.

Dairy farmers work tirelessly year-around to ensure that their products are healthy, free of disease, and wholesome. Enjoy drinking milk safely by consuming processed, pasteurized milk.

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