

# Public Health Fact Sheet

## **The Dangers of Raw Milk**



Milk and milk products provide a wealth of nutritional benefits. Raw milk can harbor dangerous microorganisms that can pose serious health risks to you and your family.

Raw milk is milk from cows, sheep, or goats that has not been pasteurized to kill harmful bacteria. This raw, unpasteurized milk can carry dangerous bacteria such as *Campylobacter*, *Salmonella*, *E. coli*, and *Listeria*, which are responsible for causing numerous foodborne illnesses.

These harmful bacteria can seriously affect the health of anyone who drinks raw milk, or eats foods made from raw milk. However, the bacteria in raw milk can be especially dangerous to **pregnant women, children, the elderly, and people with weakened immune systems.**

### **Pasteurization**

Pasteurization is a process that kills harmful bacteria by heating milk to a specific temperature for a set period of time. First developed in 1864, this process kills harmful organisms like *Campylobacter*, bacteria responsible for such diseases as listeriosis, typhoid fever, tuberculosis, diphtheria and brucellosis. Research shows no meaningful difference in the nutritional values of pasteurized and unpasteurized milk.

### **Raw Milk can Cause Serious Illness**

Campylobacteriosis is a bacterial illness causing diarrhea (often bloody), fever, and abdominal cramps 2-5 days after exposure. Illness may persist for 1-2 weeks and some people require treatment. The elderly, infants, and those with weak immune systems are more likely to have a severe or enduring illness. Persons who are ill with these symptoms and have consumed raw milk recently should consult with their medical provider and ask about being tested for *Campylobacter* infection.

### **Raw Milk & Pasteurization: Debunking Milk Myths**

While pasteurization has helped provide safe, nutrient-rich milk and cheese for over 120 years, some people continue to believe that pasteurization harms milk and that raw milk is a safe healthier alternative.

Common myths and proven facts about milk and pasteurization:

- Pasteurization **DOES** kill harmful bacteria.
- Pasteurization **DOES** save lives.
- Pasteurizing milk **DOES NOT** cause lactose intolerance and allergic reactions. Both raw milk and pasteurized milk can cause allergic reactions in people sensitive to milk proteins.
- Raw milk **DOES NOT** kill dangerous pathogens by itself.
- Pasteurization **DOES NOT** reduce milk's nutritional value.
- Pasteurization **DOES NOT** mean that it is safe to leave milk out of the refrigerator for extended time, particularly after it has been opened.