Safe at the Plate

Food safety resources for the public

West Virginia Retail Food Safety COLLABORATIVE

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Safe and healthy food wherever you eat

Raw Milk Myths

What Is Raw Milk?

Raw milk is unpasteurized milk. Pasteurization is a process that was developed by Louis Pasteur in 1864. It is a simple and effective method of killing harmful bacteria without significantly affecting the nutritional value or taste of milk. The process kills the bacteria that can cause foodborne illnesses by quickly heating milk to a high temperature and then rapidly cooling it.

Raw Milk Myths

There are many myths about drinking raw milk. Some people promote it as a healthier food and deny the dangers raw milk can pose to one's health. Knowing the facts about raw milk is important in preventing foodborne illness.



Myth: Raw milk is more nutritious than pasteurized milk.

Fact: Pasteurization does not destroy the nutritional value of milk. Both raw and pasteurized milk have the same protein and calcium levels. Vitamin levels in raw milk are only slightly higher for some vitamins like Vitamin C.



Myth: Raw milk cures lactose intolerance or allergies.

Fact: Raw milk contains the exact same amount of lactose and milk proteins as pasteurized milk. It does not prevent or treat allergies, asthma, or lactose intolerance.

Myth: Raw milk provides good bacteria and health benefits for your gut.

Fact: Raw milk lacks beneficial probiotics for human digestion. Probiotic microorganisms must be of human origin in order to have an impact on human health.

Myth: Raw milk is more effective in preventing osteoporosis than pasteurized milk.

Fact: No scientific studies have shown that pasteurized milk is linked to osteoporosis or substantiated the claim that raw milk promotes calcium deposition in bone. Studies have shown that both the concentration of calcium and its bio-availability are not affected by pasteurization.

Myth: Milk from clean or organic farms is free of germs.



Fact: While good practices on farms can reduce environmental contamination, they cannot guarantee safety from harmful germs. Also, even healthy animals in sanitary conditions can harbor dangerous bacteria like *E. coli*, *Salmonella*, *Listeria*, and *Campylobacter* in their udders.

Myth: Raw milk is as safe as pasteurized milk.

Fact: A research study published in the journal ***Emerging Infectious Diseases*** found that the rate of foodborne illness outbreaks caused by raw milk and products made from raw milk was 840 times greater than outbreaks linked to pasteurized milk! The same study found that persons drinking raw milk were 45 times more likely to be hospitalized with a foodborne illness.

Myth: The illnesses caused by raw milk are mild and people recover quickly from them.

Fact: Illnesses like *E. coli*, *Campylobacter*, *Listeria,* and *Salmonella* are serious illnesses that can result in long-term health effects, hospitalization, and even death. Children, seniors, pregnant individuals, and people with weakened immune systems face the highest threat of severe complications. For example:

- *E. coli* infections can cause kidney failure (hemolytic uremic syndrome) and death, especially in children under six years old.
- *Listeria* infections in pregnant women are usually mild and some pregnant women never have symptoms. However, infection during pregnancy usually leads to miscarriage, stillbirth, premature delivery, or life-threatening infection of the newborn.
- In a notable *Salmonella* Typhimurium outbreak linked to raw milk, 70%-73% of cases occurred in children and adolescents under 18 years old.

Experts Say:

"Pasteurized milk provides all the nutritional benefits of milk while eliminating harmful bacteria that can cause severe illness, particularly in young children. Raw milk, on the other hand, poses unnecessary health risks and has been linked to serious infections and hospitalizations." — Robert Frenck, MD, FAAP, Chair of the Section on Infectious Diseases, American Academy of Pediatrics.