

Nutrition FACT CHECK

Raw Milk



What is raw milk?

Raw milk has not undergone pasteurization, a process that heats milk to a specific temperature and then cools quickly. The key purpose of pasteurization is to eliminate harmful microorganisms, for example the pathogens that cause diphtheria, typhoid, tuberculosis and brucellosis, such as *E. Coli*.

Nearly all major national and international health organizations strongly recommend consuming only pasteurized milk and dairy products. These organizations include the American Medical Association, American Academy of Pediatrics, American Public Health Association, American Veterinary Medical Association, International Association for Food Protection, National Environmental Health Association and the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA).

Research consistently shows no significant nutritional advantage of raw milk over pasteurized milk

Pasteurization does not significantly alter milk protein quality or affect mineral content, as minerals are largely heat-stable. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the FDA, pasteurized milk provides comparable nutrients to raw milk — without the added safety risks.

Raw milk consumption

Because raw milk is unpasteurized, it can contain harmful bacteria and consuming contaminated raw milk may lead to symptoms including nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, fever, abdominal pain and headaches. And in some cases, raw milk can cause severe or life-threatening illnesses.

Certain groups face a higher risk of severe illness or death if they consume raw milk, including children under the age of 5, adults 65 and older, individuals with compromised immune systems and pregnant people.

Health impacts and associated risks of raw milk consumption

Before pasteurization became common in the late 1800s, milk from animals was a leading source of foodborne disease. While overall dairy-related illnesses have declined since 1938, outbreaks in the past two decades have primarily involved *Salmonella enterica*, *Listeria monocytogenes*, *Campylobacter jejuni* and *E. coli* O157:H7.



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Between 2009 and 2014, unpasteurized dairy products were found to cause 840 times more illnesses and 45 times more hospitalizations than pasteurized dairy products.

- Between 2000 and 2006, 40 outbreaks linked to raw milk consumption were reported in the United States, resulting in approximately 600 illnesses, primarily caused by *Campylobacter* and *E. coli* O157:H7.
- From 2013 to 2018, 75 outbreaks and 675 illnesses were linked to unpasteurized milk in the United States, with nearly half affecting children and adolescents.
- Notable pediatric cases included severe hemolytic urea syndrome (HUS) in children following consumption from cow-leasing programs in Washington (2005) and California (2006), prompting hospitalization and legal action.
- Raw milk cheese has also been linked to several outbreaks since 2000.

Nutrition Fact Check bottom line

While raw milk is often promoted for nutritional, immunological or probiotic benefits, existing research has not shown clear or consistent advantages compared with pasteurized milk. With no proven health benefits and increased risk of preventable exposure to foodborne disease, **pasteurized milk remains the safer and more reliable option for public consumption.**

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