

Unpasteurised or raw milk is considered to be a public health risk by food safety regulatory agencies throughout Australia. This fact sheet outlines some of the things about raw milk that make regulators consider it as unsuitable for sale for human consumption.

What pathogens can raw milk contain?

Milk can contain dangerous disease-causing bacteria or germs, also known as pathogens.

Pathogens that may be found in milk include:

- ***E. coli* O157: H7** – This is a very dangerous bug that has emerged in recent years. It can lead to kidney failure or even death. Even tiny numbers of *E. coli* can cause serious trouble.
- ***Listeria monocytogenes*** – This can also cause a serious illness in humans known as Listeriosis. Infection in pregnant women can lead to stillbirths or to infant death soon after birth. *Listeria* is widespread in the farm environment, especially in the soil. This can lead to the contamination of milk at milking time.
- **Brucellosis** - This can cause abortions and “Undulating Fever” in humans.
- Other diseases that can be contracted from the consumption of raw milk include **Tuberculosis**, **Salmonellosis** and **Campylobacteriosis**.

How does milk become contaminated?

With healthy cows, the milk inside the cows udder has very few germs. However, if animals have diseases such as mastitis or TB then pathogens can be present in the milk even inside the udder. During milking there is the possibility of contamination of the milk from the cow (surfaces of teats, cow hairs etc) and from unclean milking equipment or the milking environment.

What does pasteurisation do?

Pasteurisation kills or inactivates all pathogens including *E. coli* O157, *Listeria* etc. It involves heating the milk to a high temperature for a short time (72°C for 15 seconds). Rapid cooling after pasteurisation is important. Pasteurisation has little effect on the flavour or nutritional value of the milk.



Are pathogens in raw milk a problem in Australia?

There were five confirmed Australian outbreaks of gastroenteritis resulting from the consumption of raw milk between 1999 and 2001. A national study conducted by the Co-operative Research Centre for Water Quality and Treatment identified raw milk as a risk factor for the spread of the pathogen *Cryptosporidium* spp.

An outbreak of *Campylobacter* in South Australia earlier this year that affected 21 people was attributed to the consumption of raw milk during a farm visit by a group of school children.

What is the position on the sale of unpasteurised milk?

Under the Australian Food Standards Code, milk is required to be processed unless provided for elsewhere in the Code or unless a State law specifically provides otherwise.

No Australian State permits the general sale of unpasteurised cows milk for drinking purposes or other unpasteurised dairy products. In Queensland limited exemption exists only for personal consumption from own animals (proposed to be restricted to consumption on the property on which the animal is located) and for controlled production of unpasteurised goats milk (this exemption is currently subject to review).

Australian jurisdictions prefer to maintain a nationally consistent approach to food standards and Food Standards Australia New Zealand has the important role of protecting community health and safety through administering and maintaining these standards.