

Simple basics often ignored

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Despite warnings by public health professionals, amongst them veterinarians, people are still willing to consume unpasteurized dairy products. The game of Russian roulette that unpasteurized milk products present would not be publically tolerated in most other areas of food safety, yet unsubstantiated claims that raw milk has better nutritional and medicinal qualities than pasteurized milk persist.

Consuming unpasteurized products carries a "very high" risk of disease, and can lead to serious illness in people, especially pregnant women, young children, the elderly, and those with weakened immune systems.

It seems incongruous this type of risk is tolerated in a developed nation when other choices are readily available. A month seldom goes by without reports of illness in humans following consumption of raw or unpasteurized milk from cows, sheep and goats. Disease-causing bacteria found in unpasteurized milk include coliforms including highly pathogenic strains like *E. coli* O157:H7, *Salmonella*, *Campylobacter*, *Listeria*, *Brucella* (*B. mellitensis*), *Coxiella* (Q fever), *Neospora* and *Mycobacteria* (TB). These harmful bacteria can seriously affect the health of anyone who drinks raw milk, or eats foods made from raw milk.

By law, milk sold or distributed in many jurisdictions must be pasteurized. Commercial pasteurization dates back to 1895. Recently, raw milk was at the centre of a court battle in Ontario where a dairy farmer seeking to circumvent that province's mandatory pasteurization requirements introduced a "cow share" program.

For those who have had to stand by and watch a granddaughter suffer through the blood transfusions and hemolytic crisis of *E. coli* O157:H7 innocently acquired from a small sample of unpasteurized cheese at a respected farmers market, the decision seems simple.