

PRESS RELEASE

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Thinking of Trying Raw Milk? Know the Risks!

**By the Vermont Veterinary Medical Association
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Many people who want to develop a healthy lifestyle think about adding raw milk to their diet, believing it has health benefits. Raw milk is milk from cows, sheep, or goats that has not been pasteurized to kill harmful germs, including bacteria and viruses. Pasteurization is a process that heats milk to a certain temperature for a set period of time to kill these harmful microbes. Raw milk and products made from unpasteurized raw milk including yogurt, pudding, ice cream, frozen yogurt, and processed cheeses are sold in Vermont. If you choose to consume unpasteurized dairy products, you should be aware that raw milk can contain dangerous bacteria that can pose serious health risks to you and your family.

Milk can be contaminated with bacteria such as *E. coli*, *Campylobacter*, *Listeria*, and *Salmonella* at the farm, no matter what precautions the farmers take. Many of these bacteria can be carried by perfectly healthy cows that show absolutely no signs of illness. Milk can become contaminated during the process of milking, handling, or storage. Bacteria in manure, from the skin of cows, the environment, insects, and even humans from soiled clothing and boots are all sources of contamination. During transportation and storage, any period of time above refrigeration temperature is an opportune time for contaminating bacteria to grow and multiply. It is a common myth that raw milk kills these dangerous bacteria by itself; in fact, pasteurization is needed to kill these bacteria.

You cannot tell by looking, tasting, or smelling a bottle of raw milk if it is safe to drink. Bacteria are microscopic and can be present without your knowing. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported in 2012 that unpasteurized raw milk is not only 150 times more likely to cause food borne illness than is pasteurized milk, but it also results in more serious illness, reflected in a 13 times higher rate of hospitalization than does food borne illness involving pasteurized products.

In Vermont, there may be a widespread perception that, because raw milk has been drunk without illness occurring, it is a safe product. In truth, the health risks from raw milk are real and possibly severe, particularly for children, pregnant women, the elderly, and immunocompromised people. *Campylobacter* is a common cause of diarrhea and has the potential to cause long-lasting, severe illness. *E. coli* causes diarrhea and can cause life-

threatening kidney failure, particularly in young children. Listeria can cause miscarriage and can threaten the life of newborn infants.

Most dairy products sold commercially in the US contain pasteurized milk or cream. The label will say "pasteurized". If you choose to consume raw milk and products made from it, be aware that there is no guarantee that it is safe from illness-causing bacteria. The American Academy of Pediatrics has recently joined the Vermont Veterinary Medical Association, along with a long list of health and safety associated bodies, in issuing a policy statement recommending the consumption and sale of only pasteurized milk products. For more information, visit www.fda.gov or www.cdc.gov.

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The Vermont Veterinary Medical Association (VVMA), founded in 1898, is a professional organization of 340 veterinarians dedicated to compassionate animal care and quality medicine.