

PUBLIC HEALTH VETERINARIAN COALITION COMMITTEE

AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF PUBLIC HEALTH VETERINARIANS

VETERINARY PUBLIC HEALTH POLICY STATEMENTS-2000

Position Statement on Raw (Unpasteurized) Milk/Products

Developed by the American Association Of Public Health Veterinarians

Background: All food products of animal origin consumed in the raw state present a potential health threat to consumers. In addition, *Escherichia coli* 0157:H7, first identified in 1982, is now rapidly emerging as one of the most important foodborne pathogens in North America. Undercooked ground beef is the most frequently reported food vehicle for *E. Coli* 0157:H7, but infections have also been linked to the consumption of raw milk. During 1993, the Oregon State Health Division reported two outbreaks of *E. Coli* 0157:H7 associated with the consumption of raw milk. In one of these outbreaks, an infant was provided a bottle of raw milk and was hospitalized after developing severe hemolytic uremic syndrome (kidney damage). *E. Coli* 0157:H7 was isolated from milking cows at the two implicated dairy herds.

Cattle are considered to be the reservoir of this pathogen. The organism is shed in the feces; and may infect the udder (as has been shown with *Salmonella*). Most often, raw milk becomes contaminated with *E. Coli* 0157:H7 when there is poor hygiene at the dairy resulting in fecal contamination of the udder and, subsequently, the milk. Like other pathogens found in raw milk/products, *E. Coli* 0157:H7 is killed by standard pasteurization methods. Although a dairy may strictly adhere to clean procedures in collecting milk, it is impossible to completely eliminate occasional contamination of raw milk by disease-producing organisms carried in bovine feces. Milk can also be intrinsically contaminated if the cow's udder is infected. Pasteurization of milk is the acknowledged, time-honored method to destroy this and other pathogens in milk/products.

Less than 20 states in the United States permit the sale and distribution of packaged raw milk/products intrastate. The FDA banned the interstate shipment of raw milk/products, including certified raw milk, in part because of concerns about contamination with *Salmonella dublin* which it considered a "life-threatening hazard" (FDA Consumer, 1986 Sep; 20(7)). Many pathogens including other *Salmonella* serotypes and *Campylobacter* are well-documented links to the consumption of raw milk/products.

Key Public Health Issues:

- Many human pathogens have been documented in raw milk (e.g., *Salmonella*, *Campylobacter*, *Yersinia*, *Listeria*, *Brucella*, *E. coli*).
- Consumption of raw milk products has been identified as an important risk factors for *E. Coli* 0157:H7.
- Pasteurization of milk/products prior to sale is not required in all states.

Final Position Statement:

The Public Health Veterinarian Coalition Committee recommends that only pasteurized milk/products be consumed or sold.