

Chief Health Officer Advisory

2 December 2014

Status: Active

Unpasteurised milk health warning

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Issued by: Dr Rosemary Lester, Chief Health Officer, Victoria

Issued to: Health professionals, consumers

Key messages

- Unpasteurised milk should never be consumed as it has an increased risk of individuals acquiring gastrointestinal illness from pathogens such as campylobacter, cryptosporidiosis, shiga toxin-producing e. Coli, and listeria monocytogenes.
- The Department has recently been notified of several children contracting cryptosporidiosis and haemolytic uraemic syndrome (HUS), a rare but potentially fatal condition which can be caused by shiga toxin and verotoxin producing E.coli. All children had consumed unpasteurised milk sold as 'bath milk'.
- The sale of unpasteurised (raw) cow's milk for human consumption is illegal in Victoria. Everyone should be discouraged from consuming unpasteurised milk products or feeding these products to children.
- A faecal specimen should be collected from any patient who has consumed unpasteurised milk and presents with persistent diarrhoea.

What is the issue?

The Department has been notified of a number of illnesses including three cases of Haemolytic Uraemic Syndrome (HUS) and two cases of cryptosporidiosis. All cases have consumed unpasteurised (raw) milk which is sold as 'bath' or 'cosmetic' milk in Victoria.

Cryptosporidiosis is a parasitic infection that commonly presents are gastroenteritis with watery diarrhoea.

HUS is a rare condition which can be caused by shiga toxin and verotoxin producing E.coli that affects the kidneys and the bloodstream. Children are most susceptible to contracting HUS, which begins with abdominal pains and bloody diarrhoea which can last for about a week. Serious cases of HUS can lead to renal failure and death.

Only small numbers of these pathogens are needed to cause illness.

Who is at risk?

Everybody is vulnerable to illness associated with the consumption of unpasteurised milk.

However, the risks are even greater for:

- children
- the elderly
- anyone who is immunocompromised or has underlying health problems
- pregnant women.

Symptoms and transmission

Drinking unpasteurised milk has an increased risk of acquiring gastrointestinal illness from pathogens such as campylobacter, cryptosporidiosis, shiga toxin-producing E.coli, and listeria monocytogenes.

Consumers exposed to these pathogens may experience mild gastrointestinal illness (vomiting and diarrhoea) to life threatening illness such as listeriosis and haemolytic uraemic syndrome (HUS)

Prevention/treatment

In Australia, the sale of unpasteurised (raw) cow's milk for human consumption is illegal. In Victoria, it is also illegal to package, deliver or provide unpasteurised (raw) milk for human consumption. Unpasteurised milk is sometimes labelled and sold for cosmetic use only.

Packaging of unpasteurised milk is often very similar to other milk products.

Unpasteurised milk should not be consumed. If patients do present with severe gastrointestinal illness and have consumed bath milk, information about the dangers associated with the consumption of unpasteurised milk should be provided.

More information

Dairy Food Safety Victoria – Raw milk risks

<http://www.dairysafe.vic.gov.au/documents>

The Blue Book – Verotoxin-producing E. coli (VTEC) & HUS (Haemolytic Uraemic Syndrome)

<http://ideas.health.vic.gov.au/diseases/verotoxin-producing-e-coli.asp>

The Blue Book – Cryptosporidiosis

<http://ideas.health.vic.gov.au/bluebook/cryptosporidiosis.asp>

The Blue Book – Campylobacter infection

<http://ideas.health.vic.gov.au/bluebook/campylobacter.asp>

The Blue Book – Listeriosis

<http://ideas.health.vic.gov.au/bluebook/listeriosis.asp>

The Blue Book – Salmonellosis

<http://ideas.health.vic.gov.au/bluebook/salmonellosis.asp>

Contacts

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Yours sincerely



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Chief Health Officer

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