

Media Release

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The risky business of unpasteurised milk products

Dairy Food Safety Victoria (DFSV) the independent authority to regulate dairy food safety issued advice today that drinking unpasteurised or raw milk products may be unsafe due to potential disease causing organisms being present.

DFSV Chief Executive Officer Dr Anne Astin said raw milk products are available through some health food retail outlets, farmers markets, produce and bush markets across Victoria.

“Although these products are labelled for pet or cosmetic use and not for human consumption it is possible that they are being consumed by some people. As there are no food safety programs required for the production and distribution of these milk products, their safety cannot be assured by authorities,” said Dr Astin.

DFSV has monitored the microbiological content of some of these products. Results have found varying levels of potentially harmful bacteria such as *E. coli*, *Staphylococci* and *Listeria* to be present. Other organisms that can be found in raw milk products and have the potential to cause disease include *Salmonella*, *Bacillus cereus* and *Campylobacter jejuni*.

“Australian food laws require that cow’s milk products sold for human consumption be pasteurised and there are good public health reasons for that,” said Dr Astin. “The value in pasteurisation is that it heats the milk to a temperature just high enough to kill bacteria without significantly altering the flavour or nutritional value of the milk.”

Additional work recently undertaken by the Faculty of Life and Social Sciences at Swinburne University of Technology in Melbourne has shown that no detections of pathogens at the milking stage does not match levels found in retail cosmetic products. The period between fresh-off-the-farm and in a retail outlet days later can be critical in enabling pathogens to grow to levels where they can make the consumer very sick.

“It is important that the public be made aware of the risks they are taking if they choose to drink unpasteurised milk products. Consuming these products may cause severe illness, particularly in susceptible people such as pregnant women, young children, the elderly and those that have weakened immune systems.”

“We have recently seen evidence from Wisconsin in the USA linking illness in 35 people to having drunk raw milk which contained *Campylobacter jejuni*. This is not the sort of report we would like to see coming from Victoria, where we have an enviable food safety record within the dairy industry,” concluded Dr Astin.

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