

Updated AAP guidance warns raw dairy poses severe health risks



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[American Academy of Pediatrics](#)

Unpasteurized milk, cheese and other "raw" dairy products are unsafe to drink or eat, especially for young children and those who are pregnant or breastfeeding, according to updated guidance from the *American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP)*.

The AAP renews its call for a ban on the sale and distribution of raw milk and dairy products, including raw cheeses, because they increase the risk of life-threatening infections. Claims that raw milk provides superior health benefits are not supported by scientific evidence.

The statement, "Consumption of Unpasteurized (Raw) Milk and Milk Products by Pregnant People and Children," is published in the November 2026 *Pediatrics* (published online Oct. 5). The policy statement, written by the Committee on Infectious Diseases and the Committee on Nutrition, will be featured during a Oct. 5 presentation at the AAP 2026 National Conference & Exhibition in San Diego, USA.

The updated guidance also highlights emerging evidence that H5N1, or highly pathogenic avian influenza, may represent a new and potentially serious risk associated with raw milk. Research suggests the virus can be transmitted from infected dairy cattle into milk, where it can reach high concentrations and remain detectable in refrigerated raw milk for up to five weeks.

Nearly half of illnesses caused by raw dairy consumption occur in people under age 20 – and a significant share of those cases are in children under 5. These illnesses can be severe and lead to life-threatening complications. Pasteurization – a safe, effective process of heating and cooling milk before consumption that has been used for more than a century – dramatically reduces the risks without taking away the nutritional value families rely on."

Adam J. Ratner, MD, MPH, FAAP, lead author

Policy statements

Policy statements created by AAP are written by medical experts, reflect the latest evidence in the field, and go through several rounds of peer review before being approved by the AAP Board of Directors and published in *Pediatrics*. This policy statement updates guidance last provided in 2014 and reaffirmed in 2025.

Despite well-documented health risks, the sale and distribution of raw milk products remain legal in at least 27 states. Raw milk is milk obtained from cows, goats or sheep that has not undergone pasteurization, the process of heating milk to eliminate harmful bacteria and other pathogens.

During the 2024 U.S. dairy outbreak, infectious H5N1 virus was detected in nearly one-quarter of raw milk samples in affected areas. While there are no confirmed human cases of H5N1 infection from consuming raw milk to date, it remains a credible, emerging threat.

Unpasteurized milk is already a well-documented source of serious pathogens including *Listeria*, *E. coli*, *Salmonella*, *Campylobacter*, and *Brucella*. These infections can lead to hospitalization, life-threatening illness, miscarriage, and death, particularly in young children, pregnant people, and those with weakened immune systems.

Those who are pregnant face especially high risks from foodborne infections. The incidence of listeriosis, for example, is estimated to be 12 to 14 times higher during pregnancy than in the general population. Infection can lead to miscarriage, stillbirth, premature delivery or severe illness in newborns.

"Parents may choose raw milk because they have heard it is healthier or more natural, but the scientific evidence tells a different story," said Mark R. Corkins, MD, FAAP, co-author of the policy statement. "Pasteurized dairy products provide the same essential nutrients without exposing children and families to preventable infections from dangerous bacteria and viruses. For infants, children and pregnant people, pasteurized dairy products are clearly the safest choice."

Source:

[American Academy of Pediatrics](#)

www.news-medical.net, October 5, 2026

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