

**Ministry of Health  
and Long-Term Care**

Chief Medical Officer of Health

Public Health Division  
21<sup>st</sup> Floor, 393 University Avenue  
Toronto ON M7A 2S1

Telephone: 416 212-3831  
Facsimile: 416 325-8412

**Ministère de la Santé  
et des Soins de longue durée**

Médecin hygiéniste en chef

Division de la santé publique  
393 avenue University, 21<sup>e</sup> étage  
Toronto ON M7A 2S1

Téléphone : 416 212-3831  
Télécopieur : 416 325-8412



November 10, 2015

**MEMORANDUM**

**TO:** Medical Officers of Health and Associate Medical Officers of Health

**RE:** Distribution and Consumption of Raw (unpasteurized) Milk:  
An Ongoing Public Health Concern

---

Many of you are aware of recent activities relating to the enforcement of legislation prohibiting the sale and distribution of raw (unpasteurized) milk under the *Health Protection and Promotion Act (HPPA)* and the *Milk Act (MA)*. I continue to support actions at the local and provincial level that reduce the risk of illness attributed to the consumption of raw milk and milk products that may contain pathogens.

Raw milk may contain harmful bacteria such as *Salmonella*, *E. coli* and *Listeria* that can cause serious illness or death. Symptoms associated with these illnesses include severe diarrhea, fever, vomiting and dehydration. They can also lead to life-threatening kidney failure, meningitis, miscarriages or death.

The public health risk of consuming contaminated raw milk is particularly important for young children who may experience more severe effects. A recent summary from Public Health Ontario indicated that between January 1, 2011 through June 30, 2015 there were 526 confirmed cases associated with consumption of unpasteurized milk or milk products. It is important to note that the "under 5" age-group accounted for 32% (167 out of 526 confirmed cases) in Ontario. Please also note that the number of confirmed cases is under-reported and is based only on cases of reportable disease that have been diagnosed by physicians with confirmation by lab tests.

This public health risk is recognized nationally since it is illegal to sell, offer to sell, deliver or distribute milk and milk products that have not been pasteurized in any province and it is also prohibited under the federal *Food and Drugs Act*. Despite provincial and federal legislation that prohibits raw milk sale and distribution, confirmed cases of illness continue to occur.

Pasteurization does not affect the quality of nutrients present in milk such as calcium, protein and riboflavin. While some people believe that raw milk offers greater nutritional value than pasteurized milk, research indicates there is no significant difference but there is overwhelming evidence that drinking raw milk can make you sick.

I urge you to be diligent with enteric case and contact tracing that may be associated with the consumption of raw milk and to follow up on possible contraventions of Section 18 (prohibition of selling and distributing unpasteurized milk) of the *HPPA*. Public Health Units are encouraged to work closely with the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs for investigating possible sale and distribution channels in your area.

With strong partnership and collaboration we can ensure the protection of public health is given the highest priority.

Sincerely,

*Original signed by*

David C. Williams, MD, MHSc, FRCPC  
Acting Chief Medical Officer of Health

c. Dr. Peter Donnelly, President and CEO, Public Health Ontario  
Roselle Martino, Executive Director, Public Health Division