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Two Dozen People Ill, Two Hospitalized Due to Raw Milk from Kasilof Dairy

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By Matthew F. Smith
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ANCHORAGE - State health officials said Monday that a total of 24 people have fallen ill, two of whom were hospitalized, after drinking tainted raw milk from a Kenai Peninsula dairy. Among the ill is an infant who did not directly imbibe the raw milk, but got sick through a secondary transmission from an adult who had.

State epidemiologists said the illnesses are the result of milk tainted with campylobacter, a bacterium commonly found in cow manure.

After receiving multiple reports of sick people, state health officials traced the source of the outbreak to a cow share program at the Peninsula Dairy. State veterinarians visited the farm to take samples and said the farm owner is being cooperative with their investigation.

Dr. Brian Yablon, an epidemiologist with the State of Alaska, said that, with raw milk, infections like this are virtually unavoidable.

“The bottom line for any operation that is providing raw milk,” Yablon said, “[is] there’s no way to make a sterile product... and that’s why, from a public health perspective, we encourage people if they’re going to drink milk, to just drink pasteurized milk.”

Backers of the nationwide raw milk movement have claimed that unpasteurized, unhomogenized raw milk—from appropriately clean farms—can provide a range of health benefits. But Yablon said the realities of milk production make raw milk inherently risky.

“No matter how safe the process is thought to be, there is always potential for contamination,” he said. “You have the absolute best of intentions, and the best of practices, but just the way the cow's anatomy is, the udder being so close to where the cow is excreting, the fact that the tail can flick things around, there are many different steps along the way where contamination can be introduced.”

The last outbreak of campylobacter state epidemiologists dealt with was from a 2011 outbreak in the Mat-Su Valley that sickened 18 people. That outbreak was also linked to raw milk from a cow-share program.

“It's just not a product that's ever going to be 100 percent safe,” Yablon said. “There's always the potential for contamination, and this is the latest example here in Alaska.”

The State Epidemiology release on the campylobacter outbreak can be [found here](#).