

Milk recall: Questions and answers about the “waterborne bacteria” *Aeromonas hydrophila*

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A manufacturer has issued a recall for fresh, low-fat milk because it was contaminated with the bacterium *Aeromonas hydrophila*. The German Federal Institute for Risk Assessment (BfR) is taking this opportunity to answer some frequently asked questions about this pathogen.

What kind of bacteria is *Aeromonas hydrophila*?

Aeromonas hydrophila is a mobile, rod-shaped bacterium that can produce cell-damaging toxins. It is widespread in nature and found mainly in surface water (lakes and rivers), hence the term “waterborne bacteria”. The bacterium is found in fish, but also in insects as well as domestic animals and livestock. Seafood is often contaminated, and the bacterium is also found in meat from livestock, as well as vegetables and dairy products.

How dangerous is this pathogen?

A foodborne infection with *Aeromonas* can lead to a gastrointestinal infection (gastroenteritis). Symptoms are usually diarrhoea, nausea and abdominal pain. Most of the symptoms disappear without the need for further treatment. If they do not subside, medical advice should be sought. The disease can be more severe in individuals with a weakened or underdeveloped immune system. They may get sepsis (“blood poisoning”).

Pasteurised milk should be low in bacteria. How could the milk still become contaminated by the pathogen?

Pasteurisation (gentle heating between at least 60 to a maximum of 100 degrees for a short time) kills microorganisms such as *Aeromonas* bacteria reliably, so it is probable that such contamination occurs subsequently.

What can I do if I have already drunk contaminated milk?

Since symptoms usually do not present themselves in healthy people, it is possible for an infection to occur without, or only with weak, external signs. However, if symptoms of gastrointestinal infection (such as nausea or diarrhoea) occur after consumption of the affected milk, a doctor should be consulted as a precautionary measure and should be informed that contaminated milk was drunk.

What should I do if I gave the milk to my child?

It is also important to watch for the occurrence of symptoms such as diarrhoea in children and, in this case, to visit a doctor as a precaution.

Can illness be transmitted from person to person through *Aeromonas*?

The pathogen is usually transmitted by oral ingestion of contaminated water or food. However, it can also be transmitted by smear infections. For example, by eating foods that have been contaminated with the excretions of a sick person. Therefore, compliance with kitchen hygiene to prevent infections is of particular importance (see, only in German: https://www.bfr.bund.de/cm/350/verbrauchertipps_schutz_vor_lebensmittelinfektionen_im_privathaushalt.pdf).

About the BfR

The German Federal Institute for Risk Assessment (BfR) is a scientifically independent institution within the portfolio of the Federal Ministry of Food and Agriculture (BMEL) in Germany. It advises the Federal Government and Federal Laender on questions of food, chemical and product safety. The BfR conducts its own research on topics that are closely linked to its assessment tasks.

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