It's Udderly Ridiculous — Another Case Of Contaminated Raw Milk

By Ruth Kava — November 30, 2017

Last spring we wrote about contamination of raw milk with the dangerous bacterium *Listeria monocytogenes*, and this fall about a different contamination of raw milk from a dairy in Texas with another bad actor — *Brucella abortus* (also known as RB51). It's too bad that more people don't listen. Now, a woman in New Jersey has become ill after drinking raw milk from the Udder Milk and Creamery, and the CDC is warning that anyone who has consumed this dairy's raw product may be at risk of serious illnesses, not to mention miscarriage. The agency suggests that they should be prescribed antibiotics prophylactically. The company supplies their ridiculous product to consumers in New Jersey, New York, Connecticut, and Rhode Island.

Ironically, the contamination with *B. abortus* likely occurred because of attempts to prevent illness in milk-producing cattle. A cow that is infected with this bug can abort any fetus she is carrying - something that the farmer obviously wants to avoid. So the cattle are given an effective vaccine against the infection. The problem arises from the fact that the vaccine contains a live attenuated (weakened) version of the microbe, and occasionally the vaccinated cattle shed some of this in their milk. This becomes irrelevant if the milk is pasteurized since that will kill the bugs. But of course raw milk is, by definition, not, so the bacteria stay alive to wreak their damage on unlucky consumers. It appears that health officials don't yet know which farm or farms supplied the contaminated milk:

> Because health officials have no direct way to let people know they may have drunk contaminated milk, everyone who consumed milk from Udder Milk in the past 6 months should receive antibiotics now to avoid having long-term health effects from the bacteria,” said William Bower, M.D., team lead for the CDC group that investigates brucellosis, the illness caused by RB51.
The CDC lists some other ailments that can be caused by B. abortus: arthritis; heart problems; enlargement of the spleen or liver. And the agency encourages folks who have consumed raw milk from this source to be alert for symptoms that might be associated with RB51, for example, fever, "muscle pain, lasting fatigue, arthritis, depression, and swelling of the testicles."

That list of possible consequences of drinking RB51-contaminated milk makes us wonder why in the world anyone would take that risk, or expose their children to it? About the only valid reason we can see is that people simply prefer its taste — there is no other advantage to be found in raw milk, and obviously many potential downsides.