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Press Release

COMMISSIONER'S OFFICE

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Alaska outbreak of *Campylobacter* illnesses traced to raw milk

At least four known recent cases

ANCHORAGE — The state of Alaska Section of Epidemiology is investigating four recent cases of *Campylobacter* infection on the Kenai Peninsula associated with drinking raw milk believed to be from an Alaska farm.

Campylobacter are bacteria that can cause diarrhea (sometimes bloody), abdominal cramping and pain, nausea, vomiting, and fever within two to five days after exposure. The illness typically lasts from several days to more than a week, with variable severity. Some people, especially young children or individuals with compromised immune systems, can develop severe or even life-threatening illness.

“Raw milk can easily be contaminated with bacteria from the cow’s skin or feces, or from improperly cleaned farm equipment,” said Dr. Brian Yablon, an epidemiologist with the section. “The milk serves as an ideal environment for bacteria like *E. coli*, *Listeria*, *Salmonella*, and as we’ve seen in this case, *Campylobacter*.”

According to Yablon, thousands of Americans have been sickened and hundreds have been hospitalized because of infections acquired from raw milk over the past 25 years in the United States.

“This is not new knowledge,” Yablon said. “The infectious risks of raw milk have been known for hundreds of years, and are the reason that pasteurization became universal practice in the United States in the 19th century.”

Although Alaska state regulations do not permit the sale of raw milk, owning shares of an animal to receive that animal’s milk is permissible. Unlike milk supplied by commercial outlets, there is no testing or pasteurization required of milk before distribution from a cow-share program.

Anyone who has consumed raw milk and subsequently experienced acute gastrointestinal illness (i.e., diarrhea, vomiting, cramps, fever) since January 2013 is asked to contact the Section of Epidemiology at 907-269-8000 (in Anchorage) or toll free at 1-800-478-0084 and ask to speak to a member of the epidemiology team.

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