

# The Truth About: MILK AND ANTIBIOTICS

**TRUTH:** It is against the law to sell milk with antibiotics.

- Milk is tested frequently and antibiotics are very rarely found. In fact, milk tested positive in less than 2 out of every 10,000 tankers in 2016 (National Milk Drug Residue Database). Milk that has antibiotics is discarded.
- When a cow is treated with antibiotics, farmers follow Federal guidelines on how long they must discard her milk in order to prevent drug residues in milk.
- If a drug label does not say how long to discard milk, the farmer must work with a veterinarian to determine the proper time.

**TRUTH:** All sources of milk undergo testing overseen by the Minnesota Department of Agriculture to ensure it meets antibiotic safety standards.

- Samples from individual farms are routinely collected and tested before milk is sold.
- A sample from every milk tanker is tested at the processing plant before the milk is unloaded. Specific steps are used before sampling, like stirring the milk, to ensure that each sample best represents the milk in that tank.
- Scientists and government officials review and approve the tests used to detect antibiotics in milk. These experts make sure the tests are able to detect even very, very low levels in milk.

**TRUTH:** Just like people, cows do get infections that need to be treated with antibiotics.

- When a cow is treated with antibiotics, the farmer must dispose of that cow's milk until tests show there is no evidence of antibiotics in the milk.
- Federal guidelines mandate the minimum amount of time that a cow's milk must be discarded after the cow receives the last antibiotic treatment.



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## Did you know?

Many farms use a diagnostic test to determine if using antibiotics would be a good treatment for different kinds of udder infections.

Having this information helps farmers make good decisions about using antibiotics.



## Antibiotics cost farms serious MOO-lah!

By law, all milk from cows treated with antibiotics must be discarded for the prescribed period of time to ensure the antibiotics are no longer in the milk.

Dairy farmers earn their living by selling milk. When milk is discarded, they lose money.

**TRUTH: Antibiotic-free is a misleading term.**

- It is against the law to sell any milk containing unsafe levels of antibiotics.
- Milk with unsafe levels of antibiotics is discarded before it is even put into the carton or jug.
- All milk that is legally sold arrives at the store after going through the same testing system.

**TRUTH: Violations for selling milk with antibiotics are rare, but the penalties are steep.**

- Penalties for selling milk with antibiotics can be in the thousands of dollars and can include loss of payment for all milk in the contaminated farm tank. This may include milk from multiple farms and loss of sales until the farm's milk has been shown to be negative for all residues.
- If a farm has multiple violations over a given time period, the farm may lose their permit to sell milk.

**TRUTH: The dairy industry is always looking for ways to improve.**

- The number-one goal of farmers is to produce healthy, safe dairy products for their family and for yours!
- The dairy industry works hard to provide education to producers and farm workers on proper drug use and treatment procedures, as well as preventing antibiotic residues.
- Research is constantly helping us learn more about how to improve animal health, reduce bacterial disease, and identify alternatives to antibiotic use.
- Improvements in vaccines, housing, feeding, genetics, and record keeping systems improve cow health and reduce the need for antibiotics.

**References:**

National Milk Drug Residue Database 2016 Annual Report.  
[www.kandc-sbcc.com/nmdrd/fy-16.pdf](http://www.kandc-sbcc.com/nmdrd/fy-16.pdf)

Minnesota Department of Agriculture. Food, Dairy, Meat and Eggs.  
[www.mda.state.mn.us/dairyinspection](http://www.mda.state.mn.us/dairyinspection)

Connect with local dairy farmers and Minnesota Department of Agriculture to learn how milk is produced and cows kept healthy!

[Midwest Dairy Association  
\(www.midwestdairy.com\)](http://www.midwestdairy.com)

Minnesota Department of Agriculture's Dairy and Food Inspection Division  
[www.mda.state.mn.us/about/divisions/dairyfood.aspx](http://www.mda.state.mn.us/about/divisions/dairyfood.aspx)



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**Minnesota One Health Antibiotic  
Stewardship Collaborative**

Minnesotans from animal, human, and environmental health are working together to be smart about antibiotic use and prevent antibiotic resistance!

[www.health.state.mn.us/onehealthabx](http://www.health.state.mn.us/onehealthabx)

This fact sheet was created in collaboration between the Minnesota Department of Agriculture, the Minnesota Board of Animal Health, and the Minnesota Department of Health.