

## Listeriosis (*Listeria monocytogenes*) Fact Sheet

**Listeriosis** is a serious infection usually caused by eating food contaminated with the bacterium *Listeria monocytogenes*. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, an estimated 1,600 people get listeriosis each year, and about 260 die. The infection is most likely to sicken pregnant women and their newborns, adults aged 65 or older, and people with weakened immune systems.

### Symptoms

- Common symptoms of listeriosis include fever, muscle aches, nausea, and diarrhea. If the infection spreads to the nervous system, other symptoms may develop, including headaches, a stiff neck, confusion, loss of balance, and convulsions.
- Infected pregnant women may experience a mild, influenza-like illness; however, infections during pregnancy can lead to miscarriage, stillbirth, premature delivery, or infection of the newborn.
- Symptoms usually begin about 3 weeks after being exposed to *Listeria*. People who are not in the high-risk categories usually have no symptoms and suffer no ill effects from the infection.

### How to Reduce Risks

- Keep food Chilled at the Proper Temperature
  - The right temperatures slow the growth of *Listeria*. Put a refrigerator thermometer in the refrigerator and adjust the temperature control, if necessary. Put a second thermometer in the freezer. Your refrigerator should register at 40°F (4°C) or below and your freezer at 0°F (-18°C).
- Use Ready-to-Eat Foods Quickly!
  - Use ready-to-eat, refrigerated foods by the “Use By” date on the package. The longer they’re stored in the refrigerator, the more chance *Listeria* has to grow.
- Keep your Refrigerator Clean
  - Clean your refrigerator regularly and wipe up spills immediately. This is particularly important, so *Listeria* doesn’t have a place to grow and then spread to other foods.
  - Clean the inside walls and shelves with hot water and a mild liquid dishwashing detergent, rinse, then dry with a clean cloth or paper towel.
- Ensure Temperature Control
  - Put the thermometer in the middle of the refrigerator. After 5 to 8 hours, if the temperature is above 38° to 40°F (3° to 4°C), adjust the refrigerator temperature control to a lower setting. Check again after 5 to 8 hours.

- Put the thermometer between frozen food packages in the freezer. After 5 to 8 hours, if the temperature is above 0° to 2°F (-18° to -17°C), adjust the freezer temperature control to a lower setting. Check again after 5 to 8 hours.
- Cook food to a safe internal temperature and use only a food thermometer to check the internal temperatures. Internal temperatures should be at least 145°F (63°C) for whole meats and fish, 160°F (71°C) for ground meats, and 165°F for all poultry. Eggs should be cooked until the yolk is firm.

**Prevention**

- Choosing the right foods and preparing them safely helps reduce the risk of illness from Listeria for at-risk people.

| High Risk Foods  | Low-Risk Foods   |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unpasteurized soft cheeses, such as queso fresco and brie</li> <li>• Unheated cheeses sliced at a deli</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hard cheeses, such as cheddar and parmesan</li> <li>• Cottage cheese, cream cheese, string cheese, feta, and mozzarella</li> <li>• Pasteurized soft cheeses heated to an internal temperature of 165°F (73.9°C) or until steaming hot</li> <li>• Deli-sliced cheeses heated to 165°F or until steaming hot</li> </ul> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unheated deli meat, cold cuts, hot dogs, and fermented or dry sausages</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Deli meat, cold cuts, hot dogs, and fermented or dry sausages reheated to 165°F or until steaming hot</li> </ul>  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Premade deli salads, such as coleslaw and potato, tuna, or chicken salad</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Homemade deli salads</li> </ul>   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Refrigerated pâté or meat spreads</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pâté or meat spreads in sealed, airtight containers that don't need to be kept refrigerated before opening</li> </ul>   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Raw or lightly cooked sprouts</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sprouts cooked until steaming hot</li> </ul>  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cut melon left out for more than 2 hours (1 hour if it's exposed to temperatures hotter than 90°F (32°C), such as a picnic or hot car)</li> <li>• Cut melon in the refrigerator for more than a week</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Melon that has just been cut</li> </ul>   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Raw (unpasteurized) milk, yogurt, and ice cream</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pasteurized milk, yogurt, and ice cream</li> </ul>  |

To report a foodborne illness, please contact the Division of Epidemiology-Disease Surveillance and Investigation at [foodborne.epi@dc.gov](mailto:foodborne.epi@dc.gov) or 844-493-2652.