



FACT SHEET

Listeriosis

What is listeriosis?

- Listeriosis is a serious infection caused by eating food contaminated with the gram-positive bacteria *Listeria monocytogenes*. The median incubation period is 21 days, but can be up to 70 days.
- Foods commonly associated are raw/unpasteurized milk or milk products, such as soft cheeses (i.e. brie, blue-veined cheese, Mexican-style fresh cheese), ice cream, raw vegetables, fermented raw-meat sausages, raw meats (of any kind), deli or luncheon meats, and refrigerated meat spreads, pates, or smoked seafood. Canned fish, meat spreads, or pates are thoroughly cooked in the canning process and are not associated with listeriosis. Any ready-to-eat foods should be cooked thoroughly before eating.
- Listeriosis can cause blood stream infections, meningitis, encephalitis and intrauterine or cervical infections in pregnant women, which can result in spontaneous abortions (2nd/3rd) trimester or stillbirths, and febrile gastroenteritis.

Who is at risk for serious listeria infection?

- Pregnant women, newborns, persons with weakened immune systems; individuals with AIDS; cancer, kidney disease or diabetes; the elderly; and anyone being treated with immunosuppressive drugs such as steroids are at especially high risk for developing listeriosis. Healthy adults and children may become ill from listeria, but they are less likely to develop serious infections.

What are the symptoms of listeriosis?

- Listeriosis causes fever and flu-like symptoms such as fever, muscle aches, and gastrointestinal symptoms such as nausea, vomiting and diarrhea. Symptoms of headache, stiff neck, confusion, loss of balance or convulsions can occur if the infection has spread to the brain or spinal column (meningitis). Listeria can cause infection of the uterus and cervix, which can result in miscarriages or fetal death especially when the infection has occurred late in pregnancy.

How is listeriosis treated?

- Serious infections are treated with intravenous antibiotics in the hospital.

What should you do if you've eaten food that you think may be contaminated or has been recalled because of Listeria contamination?

- The risk of an individual person developing Listeria infection of a contaminated product is very small. If you have eaten a contaminated product and do not have any symptoms, we do not recommend that you have any tests or treatment, even if you are in a high-risk group. However, if you are in a high-risk group and have eaten the contaminated product, and within 2 months you become ill will fever or signs of serious illness, you should contact your physician and inform him/her about this exposure.

How can you reduce your risk for listeriosis?

- Thoroughly cook raw food from animal sources, such as beef, pork or poultry.
- Wash raw vegetables thoroughly before eating.
- Keep uncooked meats separate from vegetables and from cooked foods and ready-to-eat foods.
- Avoid unpasteurized (raw) milk or foods made from unpasteurized milk.
- Wash hands, knives, and cutting boards after handling uncooked foods.
- Consume perishable and ready-to-eat foods as soon as possible.

Recommendations for persons at high risk, such as pregnant women and persons with weakened immune systems, in addition to the recommendations listed above:

- Do not eat hot dogs, luncheon meats, or deli meats, unless they are reheated until steaming hot
- Avoid getting fluid from hot dog packages on other food, utensils, and food preparation surfaces, and wash hands after handling hot dogs, luncheon meats and deli meat.
- Do not eat soft cheeses such as feta, Brie, and Camembert, blue-veined cheeses, or Mexican-style cheeses such as queso blanco, queso fresco, and Panela, unless they have labels that clearly state they are made from pasteurized milk.

- Do not eat refrigerated pates or meat spreads. Canned or shelf-stable pates and meats may be eaten.
- Do not eat refrigerated smoked seafood, unless it is contained in a cooked dish, such as casserole. Refrigerate smoked seafood, such as salmon, trout, whitefish, cod, tuna or mackerel, is most often labeled as "nova-style," "lox," "kippered," "smoked," or "jerky."
- The fish is found in the refrigerator section or sold at deli counters of grocery stores and delicatessens. Canned or shelf-stable smoked seafood may be eaten.

Report all cases to Department of Public Health by calling 915-771-5810