

## FACTS TO KNOW ABOUT...

### LISTERIA

#### What is Listeria?

Listeria is a group of bacteria found in the environment. One particular listeria species, *Listeria Monocytogenes*, can cause a serious foodborne *Listeriosis*. Listeria can be found in soil, sewage, dust, and water. It has the ability to move through animal and human intestinal tracts, including wild animals, birds, and fish. Listeria can spread to raw agricultural products by way of fecal contamination.

#### Where can it be found?

Listeria bacteria can be found in raw (unpasteurized) milk, soft cheeses, ice cream, raw vegetables, raw meats, raw fish, and raw fermented products. Listeria (which grows at temperatures as low as 37.4° F (3° C) permits multiplication in refrigerated foods.

#### Who does it affect?

Populations at high risk for Listeriosis include pregnant women, elderly, newborns, and patients whose immune systems are compromised by immunosuppressive medications.

#### What are the symptoms of Listeriosis?

Individuals infected with Listeriosis can show signs of infection within 12 hours after consuming contaminated food products. However, serious listeriosis can take 1-6 weeks to develop. Symptoms of listeriosis include fever, fatigue, nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea. Serious effects of listeriosis include meningitis, a type of brain infection; septicemia, a disease where bacteria is found in the blood stream; miscarriages, still births, or meningitis in newborns; and skin abscesses or lesions.

#### How do I know if I've been exposed to Listeria?

You cannot tell by looking at food products whether or not they are contaminated with Listeria. **The bacterium doesn't cause food to taste spoiled and it cannot be seen by the naked eye.** Listeriosis can only be positively diagnosed with a laboratory sample of blood or cerebrospinal fluid. Listeriosis can be treated with antibiotic drugs such as penicillin and ampicillin. If you think you have been exposed to Listeria, you should seek medical attention as soon as possible.

#### Helpful Tips to prevent exposure to Listeria

- ✓ Follow basic food safety procedures
- ✓ Avoid raw (unpasteurized) milk
- ✓ Avoid cheeses made from raw milk
- ✓ Keep raw and cooked foods separate
- ✓ Wash hands and kitchen utensils after using with raw foods
- ✓ Thoroughly cook all foods of animal origin

**Individuals with a high risk for Listeriosis, such as pregnant women and individuals with weakened immune systems, should take additional precautions:**

- ✓ All ready-to-eat foods such as hot dogs should be cooked to an internal temperature of at least 165°F (74° C)
- ✓ Avoid soft cheeses, which include Mexican-style cheese (queso blanco, queso fresco, queso Chihuahua, cuajada/queso salado), feta, Brie
- ✓ Even though the risk of listeriosis associated with food from deli meat is relatively low, pregnant women and immunocompromised individuals should choose to avoid these food products

For additional information concerning Listeria you can contact the following resources:

USDA's Meat and Poultry Hotline  
1-800-535-4555  
[www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)

FSIS (202) 720-9113  
FDA (202) 205-5004  
CDC (404) 639-2215

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