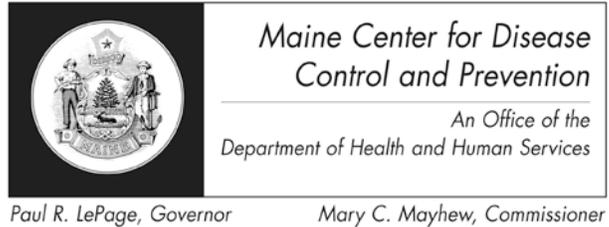


Listeriosis

Fact Sheet



What is *Listeriosis*?

Listeriosis is an illness caused by eating food contaminated with the bacterium *Listeria monocytogenes*. The disease mostly affects pregnant women, newborns, and adults with weakened immune systems.

How is it spread?

You get sick by eating food contaminated with the *Listeria* bacteria. Babies can be born with *listeriosis* if their mothers become infected during pregnancy.

What are the signs and symptoms?

Symptoms may include:

- Fever
- Muscle aches
- Nausea
- Diarrhea

If infection spreads to the nervous system, symptoms such as headache, stiff neck, confusion, loss of balance, or convulsions can occur.

Infected pregnant women may have only a mild, flu-like illness. However, infections during pregnancy can lead to miscarriage, stillbirth, premature delivery, or infection of the newborn. Healthy adults and children sometimes get infected with *Listeria*, but they rarely become seriously ill.

How do you know if you have it?

Speak with your healthcare provider if you have symptoms. During pregnancy, a blood test is the best way to find out if your symptoms are due to *listeriosis*. If your symptoms include headache and stiff neck, a blood or spinal fluid test will show if you have *listeriosis*.

Can *listeriosis* be treated?

Listeriosis is treated with antibiotics. However, even with treatment, some infections result in death. The elderly and persons with serious medical problems are more likely to become seriously ill.

How does *Listeria* get into food?

The germ is found in soil and water. Vegetables can become contaminated from the soil or from manure used as fertilizer. Animals can carry the bacteria without looking ill and can contaminate foods such as meats and dairy products. Processed foods such as cold cuts and soft cheeses can become contaminated after processing. The bacteria can also be found in unpasteurized (raw) milk or foods made with unpasteurized milk.

Listeria is killed by pasteurization and cooking. However, in certain ready-to-eat foods such as hot dogs and deli meats, contamination may occur after cooking but before packaging.

How common is it?

In the United States, an estimated 2,500 persons become seriously ill with *listeriosis* each year. Persons at increased risk include: pregnant women, newborns and persons with weakened immune systems.

How can you reduce your risk of getting sick?

- Cook meat products to safe temperatures
- Wash raw vegetables and fruit before eating
- Scrub firm produce, such as melons and cucumbers, with a clean produce brush
- Dry produce with a clean cloth or paper towel
- Separate uncooked meats and poultry from vegetables, 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
- Check temperature in refrigerator; should be 40°F or lower
- Clean up all spills in refrigerator right away; clean inside walls and shelves with hot water and liquid soap, then rinse
- Use leftovers within 3 to 4 days
- Store hot dogs in open package no longer than 1 week and unopened package no longer than 2 weeks in the refrigerator

- Store factory-sealed, unopened luncheon and deli meat no longer than 2 weeks; store open packages no longer than 3-5 days in refrigerator

If I'm pregnant, elderly or immune compromised what food should I avoid?

- Raw or unpasteurized milk, including goat milk
- Dairy products that contain unpasteurized milk
- Soft Cheeses (e.g. feta, goat, Brie, Camembert, Gorgonzola and Mexican-style queso fresco cheese)
- Avoid eating refrigerated pate or meat spreads from a deli, meat counter or refrigerated section of a store
- Avoid eating hot dogs, luncheon meats, cold cuts or other deli meats unless heated to an internal temperature of 165°F, or until steaming hot just before serving
- Avoid getting liquid from hot dog and lunch meat packages on other foods, utensils, and food preparation surfaces
- Wash hands after handling hot dogs, luncheon meats and deli meats
- Avoid eating refrigerated smoked seafood, unless contained in a cooked dish, such as a casserole, canned or shelf-stable product

Where can I get more information?

For more information contact your healthcare provider or local health center. You can also contact the Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention by calling 1-800-821-5821 or visiting www.maine.gov/idepi. The federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website - <http://www.cdc.gov/listeria> – is another excellent source of information.