



Listeriosis

What is listeriosis?

Listeriosis is a potentially serious food-borne infection. It is caused by the bacteria *Listeria monocytogenes*. These bacteria are often found in the environment, particularly in soil, vegetation, and the feces (bowel movements) of humans and animals.

Listeriosis is caused by eating food contaminated with the *Listeria* bacteria. A large variety of foods can contain or become contaminated with *Listeria*, including unpasteurized milk, soft cheeses, deli meats, produce, and raw or smoked seafood.

What are the symptoms?

Listeriosis can start with flu-like symptoms, such as fever, muscle aches, headache and backache. Diarrhea can also occur.

Listeriosis can cause serious illness like meningitis or blood infection and even death, especially in babies and young children, older adults or seniors, or those with existing medical conditions.

Listeriosis can also cause miscarriage or stillbirths in pregnant women or illness in newborn babies.

Who is at higher risk?

- Pregnant women who are infected can pass it to the fetus or newborn during delivery
- Newborn babies
- People with weakened immune systems
- People who are taking immuno-suppressing medication

People at risk who may have eaten foods containing *Listeria* and who are experiencing symptoms should speak to their doctor or a health professional.

How can people at risk protect themselves?

You can reduce the risk of listeriosis by following good food handling practices:

- Cook well raw foods of animal origin;
- Wash raw vegetables before eating;
- Keep uncooked meats separate from vegetables and other ready-to-eat foods;
- Avoid unpasteurized milk and cheese; and
- Wash hands, knives and cutting boards after handling uncooked foods.

As well, *Listeria* may grow slowly even at refrigeration temperatures, so people at risk should not keep food in the refrigerator for more than 7 days.

People at risk should either avoid or cook well the following foods:

- Soft cheeses such as Brie, Camembert, feta, blue-veined and Mexican style cheese such as queso blanco or queso fresco;
- Deli meats;
- Pates;
- Hot dogs; and
- Refrigerated raw and smoked seafood products.

For more information, see HealthLink BC Files:

[#59a Food Safety: Ten Easy Steps to Make Food Safe](#)

[#76 Foods to Avoid for People at Risk of Food-Borne Illness](#)

If you have questions or concerns, contact your health care provider or call 8-1-1 to speak with a registered nurse.



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