



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 of animals.

Listeriosis is caused by eating contaminated food. A variety of foods can contain or become contaminated with *Listeria*, including unpasteurized milk, soft cheeses, deli meats, produce, and refrigerated smoked or candied seafood. Listeriosis can also be transferred to a fetus during pregnancy or to a newborn during delivery.

What are the symptoms?

Listeriosis can start with flu-like symptoms, such as fever, muscle aches, diarrhea, nausea, headache and backache.

Listeriosis can cause serious illness like meningitis, blood infection and even death. Pregnant women, older adults or seniors, or those with weakened immune systems are at increased risk of serious outcomes.

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

Who is at higher risk?

- Pregnant women
- Newborn babies
- People with weakened immune systems
- Older adults or seniors

People at risk who may have eaten foods containing *Listeria* and who have symptoms

should speak to their doctor or a health care provider.

If you are at risk, how can you protect yourself?

If you are at risk, you should either avoid or cook the following foods well:

- Soft cheeses such as Brie, Camembert, Feta, blue-veined and Mexican style cheeses such as queso blanco or queso fresco
- Unpasteurized dairy products (E.g., milk and cheese)
- Deli meats
- Pates
- Hot dogs
- Refrigerated seafood products such as smoked and candied salmon

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

- Cook raw foods of animal origin well (E.g., meat, seafood) and avoid raw products (E.g., sushi)
- Wash raw vegetables before eating
- Keep uncooked meats separate from vegetables and other ready-to-eat foods
- Avoid unpasteurized milk, cheese and juice
- Wash hands, knives and cutting boards after handling uncooked foods
- Shop safely. Bag raw meat, poultry, or fish separately from other food items. Return home immediately after shopping so that you can store all foods properly.

Listeria may grow slowly even at refrigeration temperatures, so if you are at risk, you should not keep food in the refrigerator for more than 7 days.

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.



BC Centre for Disease Control
AN AGENCY OF THE PROVINCIAL HEALTH SERVICES AUTHORITY

For more HealthLink BC File topics, visit www.HealthLinkBC.ca/healthfiles/index.stm or your local public health unit.

Click on www.HealthLinkBC.ca or call **8-1-1** for non-emergency health information and services in B.C.

For deaf and hearing-impaired assistance, call 7-1-1 in B.C.

Translation services are available in more than 130 languages on request.