

Listeria / Listeriosis

What is it?

- Listeria is a family of bacteria (germ) that is common in our environment and usually harmless. Listeria monocytogenes is one strain of the Listeria family that can cause harm. The illness is called Listeriosis.
- Listeria monocytogenes is a dangerous strain that can be found in unprocessed foods of animal products like raw milk, soft cheese, meat, cold cuts, poultry and fish, but pasteurization and cooking destroys the bacteria.
- Listeria monocytogenes can lead to very serious illness – especially in pregnant women, newborns, the very old and people with weak immune systems.
- Listeria can cause:
 - nausea
 - vomiting
 - cramps
 - diarrhea or constipation
 - headache
 - fever
- Symptoms of Listeria usually appear within 2 to 30 days and up to 70 days after being exposed.
- A woman who develops Listeria during the first 3 months of pregnancy may miscarry. If she develops Listeria later in the pregnancy, her baby may be stillborn (born dead) or very ill.

How is it spread?

- Listeria is spread by eating food that is contaminated with Listeria monocytogenes.
- Food that is not properly cooked/pasteurized, has not been properly refrigerated, or has been in contact with contaminated cooking surfaces may carry Listeria monocytogenes.

Is there treatment for it?

- Listeria is treated with antibiotics.
- Severe symptoms such as breathing problems may need to be treated in the hospital.
- If sick with Listeria, drink plenty of fluids to prevent dehydration.

What can be done to prevent the spread of it?

- Clean your hands before, during and after handling any type of food, especially raw meat and poultry.
- Refrigerate cold food promptly. Keep the refrigerator at 4°C (40°F).
- Cook thoroughly or boil foods such as hot dogs and poultry products until they are steaming hot.
- Do not eat raw, unpasteurized milk or foods made from these products such as raw milk cheese.
- Wash raw vegetables thoroughly before eating.
- Clean all utensils, cutting boards and work surfaces with a mild bleach solution (5ml/1 tsp bleach per 750 ml/3 cups of water) before and after using. Separate utensils for raw and cooked foods.
- Follow “use by” dates especially on packaged foods with a long shelf life and use right away after opening.
- Pregnant women and people with weak immune systems should thoroughly reheat to steaming hot ready-to-eat meat and poultry products before eating (such as hot dogs).
It is recommended that pregnant women not eat cold cuts and unpasteurized cheese.

For more information visit:

Public Health Agency of Canada:

<https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/listeriosis.html>

**Stop the spread of germs and infection.
Clean your hands.**



This fact sheet provides basic general information only and is to be used as a quick guide, not as a complete resource on the subject. If you have any further questions, ask Infection Prevention & Control or your health care provider.