

Listeriosis

Listeria

Listeria is a type of bacteria found in soil and water. Animals and people can carry listeria in their bodies without becoming sick. Listeriosis is a serious infection caused by eating food contaminated with the listeria bacteria.

Listeria may be found in:

- a variety of raw foods (such as uncooked meats and vegetables)
- foods that become contaminated after processing (such as soft cheeses and cold cuts at the deli counter)
- raw (unpasteurized) milk or foods made from unpasteurized milk.

Listeria Warning

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, pregnant women are about 10 times more likely than other healthy adults to get listeriosis.

Infection in a pregnant women can cause premature (early) delivery, miscarriage or severe illness or death of a newborn.

Listeriosis Symptoms

Listeriosis may cause flu-like symptoms:

- fever
- chills
- muscle aches
- diarrhea
- upset stomach
- headache, stiff neck, confusion, loss of balance or convulsions (if the infection spreads to the nervous system).

If you have any of the above symptoms, call your health care provider. Antibiotics (medicines) are given to treat listeriosis.

Even if you do not show signs of illness, listeriosis can be passed to the fetus through the placenta.

How To Prevent Listeriosis

The U.S. Department of Agriculture and the Food and Drug Administration offer the following advice for all pregnant women, older adults, and people with weakened immune systems.

- Do not eat hot dogs, lunch meat or deli meat unless they are reheated until steaming hot.
- Do not eat store-made salads such as chicken, egg, ham, seafood or tuna salad.

- Do not eat raw or lightly cooked sprouts of any kind (including alfalfa, clover, radish, and mung bean sprouts) unless they cooked thoroughly.
- Do not eat soft cheeses such as feta, Brie, Camembert, blue-veined cheeses and Mexican-style cheese, unless it is labeled as made with pasteurized milk. The label will say “made with pasteurized milk.”
 - You may eat hard cheeses and semi-soft cheeses such as mozzarella, pasteurized processed cheese slices and spreads, cream cheese, cottage cheese and yogurt.
- Do not eat refrigerated pâté or meat spreads.
 - You may eat canned or shelf-stable pâté and meat spreads.
- Do not eat refrigerated smoked seafood (such as salmon, trout, cod or tuna) unless it is an ingredient in a cooked dish such as a casserole.
- Do not drink unpasteurized milk or eat foods that contain unpasteurized milk. Because listeria can grow at refrigerated temperatures of 40 F or colder.
 - Use all perishable items that are precooked or ready-to-eat as soon as possible.
 - Clean your refrigerator often.

Use a refrigerator thermometer to make sure the refrigerator always stays at 40 F or colder. This will help prevent food-borne illness.

When preparing food, follow these guidelines:

- Thoroughly cook raw meat (beef, pork or poultry).
- Wash raw vegetables well before eating.
- Keep uncooked meats separate from vegetables and from cooked foods and ready-to-eat foods. (Keep them separated in your grocery cart, too.)
- Do not eat or cook with unpasteurized milk or foods made from unpasteurized milk.
- Wash your hands, knives, cutting boards and any surface that may have come in contact with uncooked food before working with a different food item.

Getting in the habit of eating a safe and nutritious diet not only benefits your baby but will give you peace of mind.