



Indiana State Department of Health

Epidemiology Resource Center

Quick Facts

About...Listeriosis

What is listeriosis?

Listeriosis (list-ear-ee-OH-sis) is a contagious disease caused by *Listeria monocytogenes* bacteria. These bacteria are found in soil, untreated water, and the intestines of some animals. These animals are not sick but can pass the bacteria into the soil through manure.

What are the symptoms of listeriosis?

- Fever
- Headache
- Muscle aches
- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Abdominal cramps
- Diarrhea

Symptoms usually begin 21 days (range of 3-70 days) after exposure. Symptoms can last several days or several weeks. Healthy people may not have any symptoms, while others may have a mild illness.

How is listeriosis spread?

Most often, people get listeriosis by eating food contaminated with *Listeria* bacteria. *Listeria* is killed by pasteurization and cooking. However, in certain ready-to-eat foods, like luncheon meats, contamination may occur after cooking but before packaging. Raw produce may become contaminated by contact with soil or manure. Unlike other bacteria found in food, *Listeria* can grow in food even while refrigerated. The only way listeriosis can be spread person to person is from mother to baby during pregnancy. It cannot be spread by other person-to-person contact.

Who is at risk for getting listeriosis?

Anyone can become ill, but young children, senior adults, pregnant women, and immune suppressed individuals (such as patients on cancer drugs and with organ transplants) are at high risk for illness. Pregnant women are more likely than others to get listeriosis. Newborn babies suffer the most serious effects of infection in pregnancy.

How do I know if I have listeriosis?

Persons at higher risk for listeriosis who have unexplained symptoms should consult a health care provider. However, since many persons have no symptoms, it is often unknown if a pregnant woman and her fetus are at risk. The health care provider may collect several samples to test for *Listeria* if it is suspected.

How is listeriosis treated?

Antibiotics should be prescribed from your health care provider to treat listeriosis. If infection occurs when a woman is pregnant, prompt treatment can often prevent disease in the fetus.

How is listeriosis prevented?

- Thoroughly wash hands with soap and water after using the restroom, after assisting someone with diarrhea and/or vomiting, after contact with animals and reptiles, after swimming, before, during, and after food preparation, and after exposure to raw meat products.
- Separate raw and cooked foods.
- Maintain safe food temperatures.
- Do not eat undercooked meat, poultry, or eggs.
- Do not eat foods past the expiration date.
- Do not eat unpasteurized dairy products.
- Wash all produce before eating raw or cooking.
- Use treated water for washing, cooking, and drinking.
- Keep kitchen and environment clean and sanitized.
- The temperature of your refrigerator should be 40°F or lower and the freezer 0°F or lower. (Remember: *Listeria monocytogenes* can grow in foods in the refrigerator.)

All information presented is intended for public use. For more information, please refer to: <http://www.cdc.gov/listeria/> and Listeria and Food <http://www.cdc.gov/foodsafety/specific-foods/listeria-and-food.html>

Food and Drug Administration, Food Facts for Consumers:
<http://www.fda.gov/Food/ResourcesForYou/Consumers/ucm077286.htm>

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