

Listeria

What is Listeria?

Listeria is a germ that can cause listeriosis, which is a rare foodborne infection.

What are the symptoms of Listeria infection?

- Healthy people usually do not develop Listeria infection. People most at risk for getting ill from Listeria infection are pregnant women, newborns, adults over 60 years of age and people with weakened immune systems, diabetes or liver disease.
- Illness may begin with diarrhea or other intestinal symptoms, followed by fever, body aches, headache, stiff neck, confusion, loss of balance or convulsions. Pregnant women who are infected may develop severe complications of pregnancy such as miscarriage, stillbirth, premature delivery or severe infection of their newborn baby.

How is Listeria spread?

- People get Listeria infection from eating contaminated food. Foods that are at higher risk of being contaminated include raw milk, soft cheeses (such as brie, queso fresco or feta), smoked seafood, refrigerated pâté or meat spread, and ready-to-eat meats such as deli meats and hot dogs. Listeria is killed by pasteurization and cooking.
- Babies can be born with Listeria infection if their mothers eat contaminated food during pregnancy.

What should I do if I think I have Listeria infection?

- Consult your doctor or health care provider right away. Listeria infection can be serious and can spread into the blood or to the brain.

How is Listeria infection diagnosed?

- Your doctor or health care provider will order special blood tests to diagnose Listeria infection.

How is Listeria infection treated?

- Serious Listeria infection can be successfully treated with appropriate antibiotic medication, which is especially important for pregnant women in order to protect their babies from infection.

How do you prevent Listeria infection?

- Persons at risk for Listeria infection should avoid eating potentially contaminated foods.
- Heat ready-to-eat, processed meats until steaming hot before serving.
- Do not drink raw (unpasteurized) milk, and do not eat foods that have unpasteurized milk in them.
- Do not eat soft cheese such as feta, queso blanco, queso fresco, brie, Camembert, blue-veined, or panela (queso panela) unless it is labeled as made with pasteurized milk.
- Thoroughly wash all vegetables under running tap water.
- Thoroughly cook food from raw animal sources, such as poultry and beef, to a safe internal temperature.
- Wash hands thoroughly with soap and water before and after handling raw food.
- Wash hands, knives and cutting boards after handling raw foods.
- Clean your refrigerator regularly.

More information on Listeria can be found at:
www.cdc.gov/nczved/divisions/dfbmd/diseases/listeriosis/