

Fact Sheet: Listeriosis

What is Listeriosis?

Listeriosis is an infection caused by eating food contaminated with the bacterium *Listeria monocytogenes*. The bacteria are found in soil and water. Animals can carry the bacteria without appearing ill and can then contaminate meat and dairy products. Processed foods such as soft cheeses (i.e., feta, Brie, Camembert, blue-veined, and Mexican-style cheese) and deli meats can become contaminated after processing. Healthy adults and children occasionally get infected with *Listeria*, but rarely become seriously ill.

What are the symptoms?

- Fever
- Muscle aches
- Nausea and/or vomiting

More serious symptoms that may occur and require prompt medical attention:

- Headache
- Stiff neck
- Confusion
- Loss of balance
- Convulsions

Symptoms usually occur about three weeks after exposure; however, cases have occurred as early as 3 days to as long as 70 days after exposure.

This fact sheet is for information only and is not meant to be used for self-diagnosis or as a substitute for consultation with a health care provider. For more information, call your health care provider or call Washtenaw County Public Health at 734-544-6700.

How is it spread?

People get Listeriosis from drinking unpasteurized “raw” milk or eating soft cheeses, or ready-to-eat meats such as cold cuts or deli meats. **Pregnant women should avoid these foods to prevent passing the listeria infection to her unborn child.**

How is it treated?

- Drink plenty of fluids (such as water or juice).
- Call your health care provider if you think you have been exposed.
- An antibiotic may be prescribed for treatment.
- Take all medicines as prescribed even if you start to feel better.
- When infection occurs during pregnancy, antibiotics are given to prevent infection of the fetus or newborn. Infected babies receive the same antibiotics as adults.

Even with prompt treatment, a severe infection can result in death. The elderly, persons with other medical problems, fetuses and newborns are at high risk.

How is it prevented?

- Cook all meat products until there is no pink in the middle and the juices run clear.
- Do not drink unpasteurized or “raw” milk.
- Wash all vegetables thoroughly with running water and keep them separate from uncooked meats.
- Wash knives and cutting boards after handling or preparing uncooked food.

**For specific information on Listeriosis call:
USDA Consumers Meat and Poultry Hotline
1-800-535-4555.**

