

Fact Sheet: Listeria

What is Listeria?

Listeria is serious infection caused by eating food products contaminated by the bacterium *Listeria monocytogenes*. This bacteria is usually found in soil and water, however animals can also carry the bacteria without showing any symptoms. Listeria can contaminate products such as deli meat and soft cheeses after processing.

Signs and Symptoms

Most individuals experience:

- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Fever
- Muscle aches

Some people may experience serious symptoms including:

- Stiff neck
- Confusion
- Loss of balance
- Convulsions

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

Prevention

- 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 and keep them separate from uncooked meats.
- Wash knives and cutting boards after handling or preparing uncooked food.

How is it spread?

People can get Listeria from contaminated deli meats (such as hot dogs or bologna) and cheese. Raw and unpasteurized milk also can give you Listeria, as well as undercooked meat products.

Pregnant women should NOT consume lunchmeats and deli products unless they are heated until steaming hot. Raw milk should also be avoided. Acquiring Listeria while pregnant can lead to:

- **Premature delivery**
- **Miscarriage**
- **Still Birth**
- **Neonatal infection that can cause septicemia or meningitis**

Treatment

- Call your health care provider if you think you have been exposed to Listeria
- An antibiotic is available. Make sure to take the antibiotic as prescribed by your physician. Take all of the medicine even if you feel better.
- Drink plenty of fluids to stay hydrated
- When Listeria occurs during pregnancy, medication is given to prevent infection in the baby. The baby also receives medication after being born.

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

This fact sheet is for informational purposes and is not meant to be used for self-diagnosis or as a substitute for consultation with a health care professional. For more information about communicable disease, speak to your health care provider or call the Ingham County Health Department at (517)-887-4308.

Visit our website at <http://hd.ingham.org/Home>

or the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention at: www.cdc.gov

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