

North Carolina Women's Hospital

Safety Facts for a Healthy Pregnancy

~Listeriosis~

What is Listeriosis?

Listeriosis is a disease caused by the bacteria known as *Listeria monocytogenes* (*Listeria*). *In a pregnant woman* this disease can cause miscarriage, premature birth, stillbirth, and problems for your baby after birth. It can also cause infections to the brain tissues and seizures in the elderly and persons with chronic illnesses.

How does a person get listeriosis?

Although most people who come in contact with *Listeria* do not get sick, pregnant women are at greater risk because their immune systems are lower. *Listeria* is a bacteria that exists everywhere in our environment – in the soil, groundwater, and on plants. Eating food contaminated with *Listeria* causes most listeriosis infections in humans. The following foods may be sources of *Listeria*:

- Prepackaged precooked meats and seafood
- Vegetables and fruits
- Unpasteurized milk and cheeses
- Unpasteurized ciders

What can I do to prevent Listeriosis?

The United States Food and Drug Administration (FDA) advise you to do these things to decrease the chances of infection:

- Wash raw fruits and vegetables before eating.
- Wash hands, knives, and cutting boards after handling uncooked foods.
- Eat fruits, vegetables, and ready-to-eat foods as soon as possible.
- Avoid getting fluid from hot dog packages on other foods, utensils, and food preparation surfaces.
- Wash hands after handling hot dogs, luncheon meats, and deli meats.
- Follow the two hour rule; throw away food that has been left out at room temperature for more than two hours.
- Do not eat if pregnant:
 - Hot dogs and luncheon meats ~ unless they're reheated until steaming hot
 - Soft cheeses like Feta, Brie, Camembert, "blue-veined cheeses" or "queso blanco," "queso fresco," or Panela ~ unless they're made with pasteurized milk. Make sure the label says "made with pasteurized milk."
 - Refrigerated pates, meat spreads, or smoked seafood ~ unless it is as an ingredient in a cooked dish like a casserole.

- Refrigerated smoked seafood, such as salmon, trout, whitefish, cod, tuna or mackerel, is most often labeled as “nova-style”, “kippered”, “smoked” or “jerky”. The fish is found in the refrigerator section or sold at deli counters of grocery stores and delicatessens.
- Raw (non-pasteurized) milk or foods made with raw milk products.
- **It’s okay to eat or drink**
 - Canned or shelf stable (able to be stored unrefrigerated on the shelf) pates and meat spreads.
 - Canned or shelf stable smoked seafood.
 - Pasteurized milk or foods that contain pasteurized milk

How will I know if I have Listeriosis?

Listeria causes symptoms similar to the flu, such as chills, fever, muscle aches, and upset stomach or diarrhea. These symptoms can be mild and can come on gradually over several days or weeks. Your health care provider can do a blood test to see if you have listeriosis.

Can Listeriosis be treated?

Listeriosis can be treated with an antibiotic. Usually, this prevents infection in the fetus. Babies who are born with listeriosis can be treated with antibiotics as well. The safest choice is to prevent infection so that neither you nor your baby will need medications for this disease.

Information obtained from *Food Safety for Moms-to-Be*, the FDA Food Safety Web Site for Pregnant Women: www.Cfsan.fda.gov/pregnancy.html. Information can be obtained from the Centers of Disease Control and Prevention at <http://www.cdc.gov/listeria/>.