

What is listeriosis?

Listeriosis is a serious infection caused by eating food contaminated with *Listeria monocytogenes*, a type of bacteria.

Who is at risk for listeriosis?

The disease primarily affects pregnant women, newborns, people with weakened immune systems, and the elderly. Healthy adults and children occasionally get listeriosis, but the infection is rarely serious.

What are the symptoms of listeriosis?

Listeriosis causes fever, muscle aches, and sometimes nausea or diarrhea. If the infection spreads beyond the gastrointestinal tract, symptoms such as headache, stiff neck, confusion, loss of balance, or convulsions can occur in addition to fever and muscle aches.

Infected pregnant women may experience a mild, flu-like illness with fever and chills; however, infections during pregnancy can lead to miscarriage, stillbirth, premature delivery, or infection of the newborn.

How soon do symptoms appear?

Symptoms usually appear within three weeks, but may take as long as 70 days.

How is listeriosis spread?

People get listeriosis by eating food contaminated with *Listeria*, which is commonly found in soil and water. Vegetables can become contaminated from soil or from manure used as fertilizer. Animals can carry the bacteria without appearing ill and can contaminate foods of animal origin, such as meats and dairy products. *Listeria* has been found in raw foods, including uncooked meats, vegetables, and unpasteurized (raw) milk or foods made from unpasteurized milk. Processed foods such as soft cheeses, hot dogs, and deli meats also can become contaminated with *Listeria*.

Babies can be born with listeriosis if their mothers eat contaminated food during pregnancy.

When and for how long is a person able to spread the disease?

Mothers can spread *Listeria* to their unborn baby. Otherwise, *Listeria* is not spread from person to person.

How is a person diagnosed?

A blood or spinal fluid test can indicate whether the bacteria is present. There is no routine screening test for *Listeria* during pregnancy. A pregnant woman who is experiencing symptoms consistent with listeriosis, such as fever and chills, should consult a health care provider immediately.

What is the treatment?

Listeriosis is treated with antibiotics.

Does past infection make a person immune?

No. The illness may recur if the person is infected again.

Should children or others be excluded from child care, school, work or other activities if they have listeriosis?

Yes; most likely, anyone with listeriosis will be severely ill and require hospitalization.

What can be done to prevent the spread of listeriosis?

- Cook all beef, pork, and poultry thoroughly.
- Wash raw vegetables thoroughly before eating.
- Scrub firm produce, such as melons and cucumbers, with a clean produce brush.
- Dry washed produce with a clean cloth or paper towel.
- Keep uncooked meats separate from vegetables, cooked foods, and ready-to-eat foods.
- Consume only pasteurized milk and milk products. Avoid raw milk.
- Wash hands, knives and cutting boards carefully after handling uncooked foods.

Recommendations for pregnant women and people at high risk of listeriosis:

- Do not eat hot dogs, luncheon meats or deli meats, unless they are reheated until steaming hot.
- 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.
- Do not eat soft cheeses such as feta, brie, Camembert, blue-veined cheeses or Mexican-style cheeses (e.g., queso blanco, queso fresco and panela) unless they have labels that clearly state they are made from pasteurized milk.
- Do not eat refrigerated pâté or meat spreads. Canned or shelf-stable pâté and meat spreads may be eaten.
- Do not eat refrigerated smoked fish, unless it is contained in a cooked dish, such as a casserole. Refrigerated smoked fish, such as salmon, trout, whitefish, cod, tuna or mackerel, is labeled as “nova-style,” “lox,” “kippered,” “smoked” or “jerky” and can be found in the refrigerator section or deli counters of grocery stores and delicatessens. Canned or shelf-stable smoked seafood may be eaten.

Additional Information:

For additional information, call the North Dakota Department of Health at 800.472.2180.

This disease is a reportable condition. As mandated by North Dakota law, any incidence of this disease shall be reported to the North Dakota Department of Health.

Resources:

1. *Red Book: 2015 Report of the Committee on Infectious Diseases*. 30th ed. [Children in Out-Of-Home Care]. Kimberlin, DW; Brady, MT; Jackson, MA; Long, SS. American Academy of Pediatrics. 2015: 132-151.
2. *Red Book: 2015 Report of the Committee on Infectious Diseases*. 30th ed. [Listeria monocytogenes Infections]. Kimberlin, DW; Brady, MT; Jackson, MA; Long, SS. American Academy of Pediatrics. 2015: 513-516.
3. Heymann, D. L. (2015). *Control of Communicable Diseases Manual, 20th Edition*. Listeriosis. American Public Health Association. 2015: 354-357.
4. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2015). Listeria. www.cdc.gov/listeria/index.html.