

Food, Listeria And You

(NAPSA)—While food poisoning is unpleasant, it can also be dangerous. There are ways to avoid it. Knowing a few facts and figures can help.

The Problem

One of the worst kinds of food poisoning is listeriosis. It comes from eating something contaminated with “*Listeria monocytogenes*” (Lm). It’s relatively rare but can be fatal, especially in people at high risk—pregnant women and their newborns, people 65 and older and those with weakened immune systems.

The Symptoms

Listeriosis usually causes fever and muscle aches. Symptoms can also include headache, stiff neck, confusion, loss of balance, and convulsions. If you ever think you have listeriosis, see your doctor. Antibiotics given promptly can cure the infection and, in pregnant women, prevent infection of the fetus.

How It Gets Into Food

“*Listeria*” is in soil, water, decaying vegetation and animals. Food processed, packaged or handled in unsanitary conditions can become contaminated. This is of particular concern with ready-to-eat, refrigerated foods such as luncheon meats, pâtés and meat spreads, because they’re usually not reheated before eating—a step that would kill “*Listeria*.” In addition, unpasteurized milk can carry “*Listeria*” as well as other dangerous bacteria, such as “*Salmonella*” and “*E. coli*.”

Unlike most other foodborne bacteria, “*Listeria*” can grow at refrigerator temperatures (40° F or below). The longer foods contaminated with “*Listeria*” are stored in the refrigerator, the more the bacteria can multiply. In addition, they can cross-contaminate in the refrigerator and around the kitchen.



Always wash hands, knives, counter-tops and cutting boards before and after handling and preparing food.

What You Can Do

High-risk people should avoid:

- Unpasteurized milk or soft cheese made from unpasteurized milk
- Refrigerated smoked seafood and raw or undercooked seafood
- Cold or improperly heated hot dogs
- Sandwiches with cold deli or luncheon meat
- Raw or undercooked fish, such as sashimi, nonvegetarian sushi or sevice
- Soft-boiled or “over-easy” eggs
- Salads, wraps or sandwiches containing raw or lightly cooked sprouts.

Everyone should follow the four key food safety steps to prevent foodborne illnesses: clean, separate, cook and chill.

Learn More

If you have any food safety questions, you can call the USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline and speak with a food safety expert, in English or Spanish, at (888) 674-6854, M–F, 10 a.m.–4 p.m. EST. Ask a food safety question 24/7 at AskKaren.gov or via smartphone at m.askkaren.gov. Also, visit www.fsis.usda.gov for safety information on all types of foods.