

# Listeria / Listeriosis

---

## What is it?

- Listeria is a family of bacteria that is common in our environment and usually harmless. Listeria monocytogenes is one strain of the Listeria family that can cause harm. The illness is called Listeriosis.
- Listeria monocytogenes is a dangerous strain that can be found in unprocessed foods of animal products like raw milk, soft cheese, meat, cold cuts, poultry and fish, but pasteurization and cooking destroys the bacteria.
- Listeria monocytogenes can lead to very serious illness – especially in pregnant women, newborns, the very old and people with weak immune systems.
- Listeria can cause:
  - nausea
  - vomiting
  - cramps
  - diarrhea or constipation
  - headache
  - fever
- Symptoms of Listeria usually appear within 2 to 30 days and up to 70 days after being exposed.
- A woman who develops Listeria during the first 3 months of pregnancy may miscarry. If she develops Listeria later in the pregnancy, her baby may be stillborn (born dead) or very ill.

## How is it spread?

- Listeria is spread by eating food that is contaminated with Listeria monocytogenes.
- Food that is not properly cooked/pasteurized, has not been properly refrigerated, or has been in contact with contaminated cooking surfaces may carry Listeria monocytogenes.

## Is there treatment for it?

- Listeria is treated with antibiotics.
- Severe symptoms may need to be treated in the hospital.
- If sick with Listeria, drink plenty of fluids to prevent dehydration.

## What can be done to prevent the spread of it?

- Clean your hands before, during and after handling any type of food, especially raw meat and poultry.
- Refrigerate cold food promptly. Keep the refrigerator at 4°C (40°F).
- Cook thoroughly or boil foods such as hot dogs and poultry products until they are steaming hot.
- Do not eat raw, unpasteurized milk or foods made from these products such as raw milk or cheese.
- Wash raw vegetables thoroughly before eating.
- Clean all utensils, cutting boards and work surfaces with a mild bleach solution (5ml/1 tsp bleach per 750 ml/3 cups of water) before and after using. Separate utensils for raw and cooked foods.
- Follow “use by” dates especially on packaged foods with a long shelf life and use right away after opening.
- Pregnant women and people with weak immune systems should thoroughly reheat to steaming hot ready-to-eat meat and poultry products before eating (such as hot dogs).
- It is recommended that pregnant women not eat cold cuts and unpasteurized cheese.

**Stop the spread of germs and infection.  
Clean your hands.**

