

Listeria: The Basic Facts

What is Listeria?

Recent recalls for various types of products sold across the U.S. have been a result of *Listeria monocytogenes* (*Lm*). *Lm* causes Listeriosis in people, a foodborne illness or “food poisoning.”

In the past year, national recalls have involved ice cream, hummus, frozen spinach, and packaged caramel apples, all as a result of *Lm* contamination. Other foods associated with *Lm* include unpasteurized milk and dairy products, ready-to-eat deli meats and hot dogs, meat spreads/pâtés, refrigerated smoked seafood products and raw sprouts.

Where is Listeria?

Listeria is naturally found in the environment in water, soil and some animals. It can be present in raw milk and foods made with raw milk. It can live in food processing plants.

It is unlike other pathogens because it can grow even in cold temperatures, including inside your refrigerator. Listeria is killed by cooking and pasteurization.

How can you prevent Listeriosis?

- Keep your kitchen clean and prevent cross contamination by washing hands, utensils, countertops and cutting boards.
- Cook meat, poultry and seafood to proper end-point temperatures.
- Keep raw meat, poultry and seafood separate from ready-to-eat foods.
- Wash all fresh fruits and vegetables under running tap water before cutting or eating.
- Do not consume unpasteurized milk or dairy products.
- People in higher risk groups should pre-heat (recommend microwaving) hot dogs, cold cuts and deli meats prior to eating.



Who is at risk?

Listeriosis is a serious infection caused by eating food contaminated with the bacterium, *Listeria monocytogenes*. Listeria does not usually affect healthy people; 90 percent of the time Listeriosis is seen in higher risk groups, such as:

- Pregnant women
- Very young children & senior citizens
- People with weakened immune systems
- People with certain diseases, such as cancer, diabetes, HIV/AIDS
- Those with organ transplants

What are the symptoms?

People infected with Listeria can take three days up to two months to show symptoms:

- Fever and muscle aches
- Nausea or vomiting, sometimes preceded by diarrhea
- Pregnant women may experience mild, flu-like symptoms and the infection can lead to miscarriage, premature delivery or stillbirth
- The elderly or those who are immunocompromised may develop meningitis

Most people require hospitalization; in recent outbreaks, 30 percent of people who became ill died. When caught early, Listeriosis can be treated successfully with antibiotics.

