

Listeriosis is a food-borne illness caused by bacteria called *Listeria*. Infected animals can spread these bacteria in their milk and cheese, and to the soil. This can infect animals, vegetables, and other foods that contact soil and animal manure.

# Listeriosis

## How is listeriosis spread?

Listeriosis is spread by eating food or drinking fluids contaminated with these bacteria.

Anyone can get listeriosis, but you are at a higher risk if you:

- ◆ Are pregnant.
  - Pregnant women get listeriosis about 13 times more often than other healthy adults.
  - Newborn babies are at risk for more serious illness if infected.
- ◆ Are an adult over age 50.
- ◆ Have a weakened immune system, caused by:
  - AIDS.
  - Cancer.
  - Diabetes.

- Kidney disease.
- Medicines for organ transplants and other serious medical conditions.

## What are signs of listeriosis?

You may have no signs. Or, you may have flu-like signs such as:

- ◆ Fever.
- ◆ Chills.
- ◆ Muscle aches.
- ◆ Diarrhea.
- ◆ Upset stomach.

**If the illness gets worse, you can have:**

- ◆ Headaches.
- ◆ Stiff neck.
- ◆ Confusion.
- ◆ Loss of balance.
- ◆ Convulsions.

**How do you know if you have listeriosis?**

The only way to know if you have listeriosis is by a medical exam. Your health care provider can examine and test for it. Lab samples may be taken from amniotic fluid, blood, feces, and urine.

**How is listeriosis treated?**

Listeriosis can be treated and cured with antibiotics. Always finish antibiotic treatment.

**Pregnant women should avoid eating soft cheeses, deli meats, and cold salads from salad bars.**

**What can happen to pregnant women if they are not treated for listeriosis?**

Listeriosis can be very serious for the pregnant woman and for her child. Listeria bacteria can pass from a pregnant woman to her unborn child. Listeriosis can cause:

- ◆ Miscarriage.
- ◆ Early birth.
- ◆ Birth of an infected baby.
- ◆ Brain damage or other problems in the baby.
- ◆ Death of both the mother and the baby.

**How can you avoid listeriosis?**

- ◆ Learn how to handle food safely. This can reduce your risk of listeriosis and other food-borne illness for you and your family.
- ◆ Avoid non-pasteurized soft cheeses.
- ◆ Cook food thoroughly.

**For more on listeriosis see:**

*Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC):*

*Listeriosis (Listeria infection)*  
[www.cdc.gov/listeria/index.html](http://www.cdc.gov/listeria/index.html)

*Listeriosis (Listeria) and Pregnancy*  
[www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/pregnancy\\_gateway/infections-listeria.html](http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/pregnancy_gateway/infections-listeria.html)

*U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), Office on Women's Health:*

*Food Don'ts; Print-and-Go Guide*  
[www.womenshealth.gov/pregnancy/mom-to-be-tools/pregnancy\\_food\\_donts.pdf](http://www.womenshealth.gov/pregnancy/mom-to-be-tools/pregnancy_food_donts.pdf)

*U.S. National Library of Medicine:*

*Listeriosis*  
[www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/ency/article/001380.htm](http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/ency/article/001380.htm)