



## Listeriosis<sup>TM</sup>

(*Listeria monocytogenes*)

### What is listeriosis?

Listeriosis is a serious infection caused by eating food contaminated with the bacterium *Listeria monocytogenes*.

### 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 to the nervous system, symptoms such as headache, stiff neck, confusion, loss of balance or convulsions can occur.

Infected pregnant women may experience a mild, flu-like illness; however, infections during pregnancy can lead to miscarriage or 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?

*Listeria monocytogenes* is found in soil and water. Vegetables can become contaminated from the 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. Raw foods most often become contaminated with *Listeria* and can include 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*.

### 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?

Consult a health-care professional. There is no routine screening test for *Listeria* during pregnancy. A pregnant woman having symptoms, such as fever or stiff neck, should consult a health-care provider. Listeriosis can be identified using laboratory tests.

### What is the treatment?

When infection occurs during pregnancy, antibiotics given to the pregnant woman often can prevent infection of the fetus or newborn. Babies with listeriosis receive the same antibiotics as adults.

### **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?**

Children who are experiencing diarrhea and/or fever should be excluded. They also should be excluded if they are unable to participate and the staff determines that they cannot care for the child without compromising their ability to care for the health and safety of the other children in the group.

Infected staff or people who handle food while symptomatic with diarrhea also should be excluded.

### **What can be done to prevent the spread of listeriosis disease?**

- Cook all beef, pork and poultry thoroughly.
- Wash raw vegetables thoroughly before eating.
- Keep uncooked meats separate from vegetables and from 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 such as queso blanco, queso fresco and Panela, unless they have labels that clearly state they are made from pasteurized milk.
- Do not eat refrigerated pates or meat spreads. Canned or shelf-stable pates 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: American Academy of Pediatrics. [Children In Out-of-Home Child Care]. In: Pickering LK, ed. Red Book: 2003 Report of the Committee on Infectious Diseases. 26th ed. Elk Grove Village, IL: American Academy of Pediatrics; 2003:[123-137].

Control of Communicable Disease Manual, 18th Edition-2004, Heymann, David, MD ed.

