

Listeriosis

Description

Listeriosis is caused by bacterium (*Listeria monocytogenes*) that is commonly found in soil, water and animal feed. It can cause a range of symptoms, including fever, aches, nausea, vomiting and gradual onset of confusion. Most people only have a mild illness, but, if a pregnant woman is infected, it can cause miscarriage, stillbirth or premature birth. Infants born to infected mothers can also suffer a range of serious illnesses and complications.

How does it spread?

The bacteria that cause listeriosis are usually spread through food. Unlike most other foodborne bacteria, *Listeria* tends to multiply in refrigerated foods that have been contaminated. Foods associated with listeriosis include:

- soft cheeses (e.g. brie, camembert, ricotta, feta, blue) and soft-serve ice cream
- dairy products that are raw or unpasteurised (e.g. milk)
- pre-cooked meat products (e.g. pâté, deli meats)
- pre-prepared or pre-packaged salads or fruits (e.g. from salad bars)
- raw or pre-cooked seafood (e.g. oysters, sashimi, prawns).

Contact with infected farm animals can also spread the infection.

Incubation period

The incubation period varies from 3 days to 70 days; the average is 3 weeks.³⁶

Infectious period

Listeria does not usually spread from person to person, except between pregnant women and their unborn children, or during delivery of the infant.

Exclusion period

Exclusion is not necessary.

Responsibilities of educators and other staff

- Advise the parent to keep the child home until they are feeling well.
- If an educator or other staff member is ill, they should stay at home until they are feeling well.
- Make sure staff and children practise effective hand hygiene, especially after handling food.
- Inform staff who are pregnant or considering pregnancy about listeriosis risks and how to protect against infection.
- Ensure that appropriate cleaning practices are being followed in the education and care service.

³⁶ 'Listeriosis', in DL Heymann (ed.) 2008, *Control of communicable diseases manual*, 19th edn, American Public Health Association, Washington, DC, p. 360.

Responsibilities of parents

- Keep the child at home until they are feeling well.
- Ensure effective hand hygiene at home, especially after handling food.

Controlling the spread of infection

- Ensure that staff and children always practise appropriate hand hygiene.
- Pregnant women or women considering pregnancy can reduce their risk of exposure to *Listeria* by:
 - avoiding high-risk foods (see above)
 - ensuring that raw fruit and vegetables have been washed in clean water
 - washing hands, knives and cutting boards after handling uncooked food
 - avoiding contact with sick farm animals
 - avoiding using untreated manure in vegetable gardens.
- Pregnant women or women considering pregnancy should pay particular attention to good hand hygiene after handling food.

Treatment

Listeriosis can be treated with antibiotics.