**Listeria**

| Sources                                                                 | • Unpasteurized (raw) milk and dairy products.  
| • Soft cheese made with unpasteurized milk, such as queso fresco, feta, Brie, Camembert.  
| • Raw fruits and vegetables (such as sprouts).  
| • Ready-to-eat deli meats and hot dogs.  
| • Refrigerated pâtés or meat spreads.  
| • Refrigerated smoked seafood. |

| Incubation period | Usually 1 to 4 weeks, can be as long as 70 days |

| Symptoms | *Listeria* can cause fever and diarrhea similar to other foodborne germs, but this type of *Listeria* infection is rarely diagnosed.  

Symptoms in people with invasive listeriosis, meaning the bacteria has spread beyond the gut, include:

- For pregnant women: fever, fatigue and muscle aches. Pregnant women may also have no symptoms but experience fetal death, pre-term labor, or infection of the newborn.  
- For all others, stiff neck, confusion, loss of balance, and convulsions in addition to fever and muscle aches. |

| Duration of illness | Days to weeks |

| Who is at risk | • Adults age 65 and older  
| • Pregnant women and their newborns  
| • People whose immune systems are weakened due to illness or medical treatment |

| What to do | For invasive listeriosis, antibiotics given promptly can cure the infection. In pregnant women, antibiotics are given to prevent infection in the unborn baby. |

| Prevention | Recommendations for everyone:  
- Do not drink raw (unpasteurized) milk, |
and do not eat soft cheeses made with it, such as queso fresco.

- Eat cut melon right away or refrigerate it.

Recommendations for people at higher risk:

- People at higher risk should not eat the following foods:
  - Refrigerated pâtés or meat spreads from a deli or meat counter or from the refrigerated section of a store
  - Hot dogs, cold cuts, and deli meats, unless they are heated to an internal temperature of 165°F (74°C) or until steaming hot before eating.
  - Refrigerated smoked seafood, unless it is canned or shelf-stable or it is in a cooked dish, such as a casserole
  - Raw or lightly cooked sprouts of any kind
  - Soft cheese, such as queso fresco, queso blanco, panela, brief, Camembert, blue-veined, or feta, unless labeled as made with pasteurized milk

- Be aware that Hispanic-style cheeses made from pasteurized milk, such as queso fresco, have caused Listeria infections, most likely because they were contaminated during cheese-making. Safer choices, especially for pregnant women, include cream cheese, mozzarella, and hard cheeses.

Date Last Reviewed September 19, 2023