# 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 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.

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