

North Carolina Women's Hospital

Safety Facts for a Healthy Pregnancy

Listeriosis

What is Listeriosis?

Listeriosis is a disease caused by the bacteria known as *Listeria monocytogenes* (*Listeria*). This disease can cause miscarriage, premature birth, stillbirth, and problems for your baby after birth. It can also cause infections to the brain tissues and seizures in older adults and persons with chronic illnesses.

How does a person get listeriosis?

Eating food contaminated with *Listeria* causes most infections in humans. *Listeria* is a bacteria that exists everywhere in our environment – in the soil, groundwater, and on plants. Although most people who come in contact with *Listeria* do not get sick, pregnant women are at greater risk because of hormone changes in pregnancy.

What can I do to prevent Listeriosis?

The United States Food and Drug Administration (FDA) advises you to do these things to decrease the chances of infection:

- Do not eat hot dogs, deli meats, and luncheon meats unless they are heated to be steaming hot.
- Do not eat soft cheese such as feta, Brie, Camembert, blue-veined cheeses or fresh Mexican-style cheeses like queso blanco fresco. However, you can eat hard cheeses, such as cheddar, semi-soft cheese such as mozzarella, pasteurized processed cheese slices and spreads, cream cheese, and cottage cheese.
- Do not eat refrigerated, smoked seafood unless it is as an ingredient in a cooked dish like a casserole.
- Do not drink raw (non-pasteurized) milk or eat foods made with raw milk products.

How will I know if I have Listeriosis?

Listeria causes symptoms similar to the flu, such as chills, fever, muscle aches and upset stomach or diarrhea. These symptoms can be mild and can come on gradually over several days or weeks. Your health care provider can do a blood test to see if you have listeriosis.

Can Listeriosis be treated?

Listeriosis can be treated with an antibiotic. Usually, this prevents infection in the fetus. Babies who are born with listeriosis can be treated with antibiotics as well. The safest choice is to prevent infection so that neither you nor your baby need medicines for this disease.

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