

Fact sheet

Listeriosis

What is listeriosis?

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

How is listeriosis spread?

People usually become ill with listeriosis after eating contaminated food such as improperly processed deli meats, soft cheeses and unpasteurized milk products.

What are the signs and symptoms of listeriosis?

- Fever
- Muscle aches
- Nausea
- Diarrhea

If the *Listeria* infection spreads to your nervous system, signs and symptoms may include:

- Headache
- Stiff neck
- Confusion or changes in alertness
- Loss of balance
- Convulsions

How long after infection do symptoms appear?

Symptoms may begin a few days after you've eaten contaminated food, but it may take as long as 30 days or more before the first signs and symptoms of infection begin.

Who is most at risk?

Pregnant women and their newborns, adults aged 65 or older, and people with weakened immune systems are more likely to get sick from *Listeria* infection.

What type of health problems are caused by listeriosis?

- A generalized blood infection (septicemia)
- Inflammation of the membranes and fluid surrounding the brain (meningitis)
- Premature birth
- Miscarriage
- Stillbirth
- Infection in the baby after birth

How is listeriosis diagnosed?

A blood test or culture is often used to determine whether you have a *Listeria* infection. In some cases, samples of urine or spinal fluid may also be tested.

How is listeriosis treated?

Treatment varies, depending on the severity of the signs and symptoms. Most people with mild symptoms require no treatment. More-serious infections can be treated with antibiotics.

How can listeriosis be prevented?

- Wash your hands thoroughly before and after handling or preparing food.

- After cooking, wash utensils, cutting boards, and other food preparation surfaces.
- Cook food thoroughly.
- Be cautious about eating foods that are more likely to be contaminated if you are at higher risk for infection.

Where can I get more information?

- Your personal healthcare provider
- [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\)](https://www.cdc.gov)
- [Utah Department of Health and Human Services](https://www.health.utah.gov)