



Listeriosis – Protecting Those with Weakened Immune Systems

Recent news about an outbreak of listeriosis may have raised concerns about your health, the health of someone you provide care for and the safety of the food that we eat.

Listeriosis is a serious disease that is caused by consuming a type of bacterium called *Listeria monocytogenes* (commonly called *Listeria*) that is sometimes found in food, water and soil.

People with weakened immune systems, including those with chronic diseases such as cancer, diabetes, kidney disease, HIV, AIDS, dialysis patients and those taking immunosuppressive drugs (e.g. transplant and cancer patients) such as glucocorticoids or cytostatics, are at far greater risk of developing listeriosis than the general population.

You can minimize your chances of contracting listeriosis (as well as other foodborne illnesses) by following these steps recommended by Health Canada:

- Wash your hands well with hot water and soap, especially before and after handling food.
- Read and follow all package labels and instructions on food preparation and storage.
- After handling foods in the kitchen, especially raw foods such as meat and fish, thoroughly clean and sanitize all surfaces used for food preparation with a kitchen sanitizer (following the directions on the container) or use a bleach solution (5 ml household bleach to 750 ml of water), and rinse with water.
- To avoid cross-contamination, clean all knives, cutting boards and utensils used with raw food before using them again.
- Thoroughly clean fruits and vegetables before you eat them.
- Refrigerate or freeze perishable food, prepared food and leftovers within two hours.
- Defrost food in the refrigerator, in cold water or in the microwave, but never at room temperature.
- Keep leftovers for a maximum of four days only and reheat them to an internal temperature of 74°C (165°F) before eating them.
- Check the temperature in your refrigerator using a thermometer to make sure it is at 4°C (40°F) or below. As the storage temperature increases, so does the growth of *Listeria* in foods. The higher the number of bacteria in foods, the greater is the risk of getting sick.
- Frequently wash and disinfect the refrigerator. The more often it is cleaned, the less chance there will be for *Listeria* to be transferred from contaminated food and surfaces to non-contaminated foods.
- Check the food recall list at www.inspection.gc.ca or by calling 1-800-442-2342 / TTY 1-800-465-7735. If there is food you have doubts about, throw it out or return it to the store.



In addition, the Health Canada recommendations below should be followed by people with weakened immune systems:

Foods to Avoid:	Safer alternatives:
Hot dogs, especially straight from the package without further heating. The fluid within hot dog packages may contain more <i>Listeria</i> than the hot dogs. Avoid spreading fluid from packages onto other foods, cutting boards, utensils, dishes and food preparation surfaces. Wash your hands after handling hot dogs.	Hot dogs reheated until steaming hot
Non-dried deli-meats	Dried and salted deli-meats such as salami and pepperoni, as they generally do not support the growth of <i>Listeria</i> . In addition, you can reduce your risk by reheating deli-meats until steaming hot.
Soft and semi-soft cheeses such as feta, Brie, Camembert and blue-veined cheese if they are made from unpasteurized milk	Pasteurized milk and milk products including cheeses made from pasteurized milk
Refrigerated pâté and meat spreads	Canned or shelf-stable pâté and meat spreads
Refrigerated smoked seafood and fish	Cooked refrigerated smoked seafood and fish. Canned or shelf-stable smoked seafood and fish.
Raw or undercooked meat, poultry and fish	Thoroughly cooked meat, poultry and fish

If you provide care for a person with a weakened immune system, then please discuss the food recall with them, look in their kitchen and refrigerator for the recalled food products and ask about symptoms.

Listeriosis can cause symptoms such as persistent fever, severe headaches, neck stiffness, cramps, constipation, diarrhea, nausea and vomiting.

Symptoms associated with listeriosis can occur in as little as 2 days or as long as 70 days after having consumed food contaminated with *Listeria*. If you or someone that you provide care for is experiencing these symptoms, you should contact your doctor or health provider.

Additional information about the listeriosis outbreak can be found by calling 1-800-O-Canada.