



LISTERIOSIS

What is LISTERIOSIS?

Listeriosis is a serious infection caused by eating food contaminated with the bacterium *Listeria monocytogenes*. These bacteria are found in soil, water, mud, livestock food and silage. They can also be found in infected domestic and wild animals, fowl and people.

Who gets listeriosis?

Anyone can get the disease, but those at highest risk are newborns, the elderly, persons with weakened immune systems and pregnant women.

How is listeriosis spread?

Listeria can be spread by several different methods. The organism can be ingested when a person drinks unpasteurized milk or eats processed foods that become contaminated after processing (such as lunchmeats) or meats or vegetables contaminated by the soil or from manure used as fertilizer. Another way the organism can be transmitted is from a mother to her fetus in utero or directly to the fetus at the time of birth.

What are the symptoms of listeriosis?

The disease may be mild or serious. A person with listeriosis may have fever, muscle aches, nausea or diarrhea. If infection spreads to the central nervous system, symptoms such as headache, stiff neck, confusion, loss of balance, or convulsions can occur.

Infected pregnant women may experience only a mild, flu-like illness; however, infections during pregnancy can lead to miscarriage or stillbirth, premature delivery, or infection of the newborn.

How soon after exposure do symptoms appear?

Listeriosis has an extremely variable time frame for symptoms to appear. In large outbreaks, cases have occurred from 3-70 days after exposure, but symptoms usually appear within three weeks.

What is the treatment for *Listeria* infection?

Several antibiotics are effective in treating this infection. Ampicillin and penicillin, either alone or in combination with other antibiotics, are frequently used.

What can be done to prevent the spread of this disease?

Since the bacteria are widespread in nature, basic sanitary measures offer the best protection:

- Only consume pasteurized dairy products;
- Properly cook all meats; and
- Wash hands thoroughly before preparing foods.

Pregnant women and persons with weakened immune systems should avoid soft cheeses such as brie and feta; heat all leftovers and ready-to-eat foods (such as hot dogs) and avoid deli meats or heat them before eating.