

# Listeria

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## What is *Listeria*?

*Listeria* is a bacterium that causes an illness called listeriosis. Listeriosis is not usually a serious illness for healthy people, but can be very dangerous for pregnant women, newborn babies, the elderly and immuno-compromised people.

## How do I get listeriosis?

You must ingest (swallow or eat) the *Listeria* bacteria to become infected. *Listeria* is usually spread through the following:

- *Listeria* can be found in unpasteurized dairy products, raw vegetables, raw meats and processed foods such as deli meats, hot dogs and soft cheeses.
- *Listeria* can be passed from mother to child during pregnancy. (Some pregnant women may never experience symptoms, but still pass the illness to their child.)
- *Listeria* is **NOT** spread from one person to another by coughing or sneezing, sharing drinks, hugging or kissing.

## Symptoms

Symptoms can begin 3-70 days (usually 3 weeks) after ingesting the bacteria.

Infected children and young adults may not have any symptoms. Symptoms include:

- Fever and muscle aches
- Intense headache, stiff neck and confusion
- Nausea or diarrhea (sometimes)
- In pregnant women, premature delivery or spontaneous abortion

## Prevention

- Thoroughly cook all meats, including processed meats such as hot dogs.
- Keep uncooked meats separate from other foods.
- Do not consume unpasteurized dairy products.
- Wash all vegetables before preparing or eating them.
- Wash your hands, utensils and cutting boards after handling or preparing raw foods.
- Pregnant women and immuno-compromised people are at particularly high risk for getting listeriosis and should avoid soft cheeses (such as Feta, Brie, Camembert, blue-veined and Mexican-style) and should cook processed meats (such as hot dogs and deli meats) before eating them.



### Hand washing steps:

1. Use soap and warm running water.
2. Scrub hands for at least 20 seconds; use a nail brush.
3. Wash all surfaces:
  - Between fingers
  - Under fingernails
  - Back of hands
  - Wrists
4. Rinse well and dry hands with a clean paper towel.

## Treatment for listeriosis

If you think you have listeriosis, see your health care provider – especially if you are pregnant, immuno-compromised, elderly or if your newborn baby might be sick. Treatment is with antibiotics.

