

Food Safety Alert: Listeria

Recent outbreaks of foodborne illness have been linked with Listeria in foods such as lunch meats and hotdogs.

ABOUT LISTERIA: *Listeria monocytogenes* can contaminate a variety of foods including uncooked meats, and cooked foods such as soft cheeses and lunch meats. When people eat this contaminated food, they can become sick with Listeriosis, an uncommon, but potentially fatal disease.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS? Listeriosis can cause high fever, severe headache and nausea. However, listeriosis can also cause miscarriages and stillbirths, as well as serious and sometimes fatal infections in infants, seniors, and persons with compromised immune systems. It can take up to 8 weeks for a person to become sick after eating contaminated food.

WHO IS AT RISK? Pregnant Women, Newborns, Older Adults, People with Weakened Immune Systems from Chronic Disease such as diabetes, kidney disease, and AIDS.

LISTERIA PRECAUTIONS

To prevent Listeriosis, people who are most at risk should:

Reheat until steaming hot the following types of ready-to-eat foods: hot dogs, luncheon meats, cold cuts, fermented and dry sausage, and other deli-style meat and poultry products. Thoroughly reheating food can help kill any bacteria that might be present. If you cannot reheat these foods, do not eat them.

Wash hands with hot, soapy water after handling these types of ready-to-eat foods. (Wash for at least 20 seconds.) Also wash cutting boards, dishes, and utensils. Thorough washing helps eliminate any bacteria that might get on your hands or other surfaces from food before it is reheated.

Do not eat soft cheeses such as feta, Brie, Camembert, blue-veined or Mexican-style cheese. You can eat hard cheeses, processed cheeses, cream cheese, cottage cheese, and yogurt.

Do not drink raw, unpasteurized milk or eat foods made from it, such as unpasteurized cheese.

Consumers with questions can phone the toll-free USDA Hotline at 1-800-535-4555. The hotline is available in English and Spanish and can be reached from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. (Eastern Time) Monday through Friday. Recorded food safety messages are available 24 hours a day.