

# **LISTERIOSIS**

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Your Questions Answered

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EAST CAMBRIDGESHIRE  
DISTRICT COUNCIL

## What is Listeriosis?

Listeriosis is a rare infection caused by *Listeria monocytogenes*. These widely distributed bacteria are found in rotting vegetable matter, sewage, soil, water, farm animals, domestic pets and man.

## How do I know that I have Listeriosis?

Only a doctor testing a sample of your blood or spinal fluid can confirm you have listeriosis.

## How is it spread?

Most cases are caused by the consumption of infected food. Pregnant mothers sometimes transmit this infection to their baby. This can happen in the womb or when giving birth. Infection by contact with animals may sometimes occur.

Unlike other food poisoning bacteria, *Listeria* is a potential hazard in chilled food since it can grow at refrigeration temperatures below 5°C. Foods known to have caused listeriosis include meat, poultry, dairy, fish, shellfish and vegetable products. The particular foods that cause most outbreaks are prepared salads, pâté, ready meals and ripened soft cheeses.

## What are the symptoms?

The commonest symptom is an acute flu-like fever. Other symptoms that may occur before the fever are nausea, vomiting and abdominal pain.

Complications like blood poisoning or meningitis may occasionally follow the fever. These tend to be very rare in otherwise healthy children or adults. People such as cancer or transplant patients, whose immunity to infection is weak, are especially vulnerable.

Those at highest risk are pregnant women and their babies. It can cause a severe condition that may cause premature birth or miscarriage and meningitis in newborn children.

## How long after exposure do symptoms occur?

This can be between 3 and 70 days after exposure. Previously healthy people usually recover within a few days. Mothers of infected newborn infants may carry the bacteria for 7 to 10 days after delivery, rarely longer.

## What can be done to avoid the infection?

The bacteria is mainly controlled by good practices in the food manufacturing and retail chain. Thorough cooking kills listeria. Any ready-to-eat foods that can be thoroughly reheated will be safe.

Those people most at risk such as pregnant women are advised to:

- avoid soft cheeses such as Brie, Camembert, Dolcelatta and goat's cheeses; 'ready-to-eat' cook chilled foods e.g. prepared packaged salads, chilled cooked poultry; and pâté

- ensure retail chilled meals are reheated thoroughly to 'piping hot'
- avoid coming into contact with sheep and their newborn lambs

## How can I prevent it spreading?

Hand washing is the most important factor in preventing the spread of infection. Thoroughly wash your hands with soap under warm running water:

- AFTER using or cleaning the toilet
- AFTER touching anything contaminated by diarrhoea or vomiting
- AFTER attending to anybody who is unwell
- AFTER handling dirty laundry, clothing or bedding
- AFTER handling used nappies
- BEFORE handling, preparing, serving, or consuming food or drink
- AFTER touching animals during visits at farms, wildlife parks, zoos, pet corners, etc

People who are ill should ideally use anti-bacterial liquid soap and separate towels or disposable paper tissues. A nailbrush can assist you to clean under your fingernails. Always dry your hands properly as this helps to remove bacteria. Young children should be assisted to ensure they wash their hands properly.

## Cleaning the toilet

For as long as people are unwell:

- Disinfect the toilet seat after each use, using a separate cloth
- Wash and disinfect other items like bedpans or potties after each use
- Disinfect the door handle, wash hand basin taps and flush handle after use
- Clean the toilet bowl using a toilet brush and disinfectant. Rinse the brush by flushing the toilet and replace in its holder
- Keep any rubber gloves used for cleaning the toilet for this use only
- Flush the toilet with the seat and lid down

## Laundry

- Dirty laundry from persons with food poisoning should be kept separate from other laundry
- If possible remove any heavy soiling into the toilet before washing
- Wash soiled clothing and bedding separately on as hot a washing programme as possible without exceeding fabric care instructions

## Do infected people need to stay away from work or school?

All cases of gastroenteritis are regarded as potentially infectious. All infected people should stay away from work or school until free from vomiting for at least 48 hours. Inform your employer, child carer or school as soon as possible to help them identify if they may have an outbreak.

If you belong to one of the following 'high risk' groups, additional precautions are needed & you have a duty to report your illness to your employer, child carer or school.

- food handlers involved with unwrapped or ready to eat food,
- staff of health care facilities in contact with food or patients,
- children aged below 5 years attending nurseries, playgroups, etc
- older children and adults who may find it difficult to carry out good personal hygiene

Infected people in these groups must not return to work, school or nursery until their symptoms have ceased for at least 48 hours. This is provided that they wash their hands thoroughly after using the toilet.

It is very important to get in touch with us if you, or anyone else in your household, are in one of these 'high risk' groups. This is to enable us to give any necessary advice to halt the potential spread of the illness.

### **Food Safety Points to Remember**

- ALWAYS keep raw meat separate from other foods
- ALWAYS cook meat thoroughly, including at barbecues. This is normally until the juices run clear
- ALWAYS reheat retail chilled meals thoroughly until 'piping hot'
- AVOID eating or drinking untreated milk or dairy products, or drinking untreated water

**REMEMBER TO WASH YOUR HANDS FREQUENTLY  
ASSIST YOUNG CHILDREN TO WASH THEIR HANDS PROPERLY  
MAKE SURE EVERYBODY FOLLOWS THESE PRECAUTIONS**

**Further advice is available by contacting your Doctor or from:**

East Cambridgeshire District Council  
Environmental Services  
The Grange  
Nutholt Lane  
Ely, Cambs CB7 4EE  
Tel: 01353 665555  
Fax: 01353 616223