

LISTERIOSIS

What is Listeriosis?

Listeriosis is a type of bacterial infection caused by the germ *Listeria monocytogenes* which is found in soil, water decayed matter and the digestive system of animals and birds. Listeriosis can be picked up from eating contaminated food particularly pate, soft mould ripened cheeses such as Camembert and Brie, soft blue cheese cheeses and unwashed fruit and vegetables including pre-packed salad. The organism has also been found in a range of chilled ready to eat foods such as pre packed sandwiches, butter, cooked sliced meats and smoked salmon.

Listeria is unusual in that it can grow at refrigeration temperatures.

What are the symptoms?

Many healthy adults pick up the listeria germ and don't have any symptoms, but it may cause severe and sometimes life threatening foodborne illness in vulnerable groups such as pregnant women and people with weakened immunity.

Since 2001 there has been a sharp rise in cases of Listeria within in the over 60s age group - cases have doubled since 2001 and it causes more deaths each year than Salmonella and E.coli O157 combined.

Unusually the early signs of listeriosis are similar to flu and include headache, fever, muscle pain and chills although some people also have diarrhoea and an upset stomach.

How can I minimise the risk of catching Listeriosis?

- Keep chilled ready-to-eat food cold.
- Make sure the fridge is set at 5 °C or below and working correctly.
- When preparing food which is to be eaten without cooking keep the time it is out of the refrigerator to a minimum.
- Foods taken out of chilled storage should be eaten within four hours – after that you should throw the food away.
- Follow storage instructions on the label.
- Use opened foods within two days unless the manufacturer's instructions state otherwise.

- Don't use food after its use by date make sure you check the label before serving.
- Wash pre-packed salads, fruit and vegetables thoroughly before eating.

What should I do if I think I may have Listeriosis?

See your GP immediately or call NHS direct on 0845 4647, if you have eaten one of the foods which has been linked to Listeriosis particularly soft mould ripened cheeses such as Camembert and Brie soft blue cheese and develop any of the following symptoms:-

headache

fever,

muscle pain,

chills,

diarrhoea

upset stomach