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Food Safety eNews
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LISTERIA – IT’S IN THE NEWS
In recent years we’ve heard about foodborne illness outbreaks from Listeria monocytogenes. The sources of the outbreaks have included raw milk, soft cheeses, hot dogs, deli meats, raw and smoked fish, pre-cut celery, cantaloupes and several types of stone fruits. Are you concerned about Listeria and how it may affect your food service business? Here’s a basic overview to help you better understand this contaminant, the risk to your business and customers, what you can do to prevent it and links to additional online resources.

WHAT IS LISTERIA?
Listeria monocytogenes is a bacterium that causes an illness called listeriosis, which can be deadly. At least 90% of people who get Listeria infections are considered high-risk and include pregnant women and their newborns, people 65 or older, or those with weakened immune systems. Most people found to have Listeria infection require hospital care. It can cause miscarriage and meningitis. About 1 in 5 people with the infection die making Listeria the third leading cause of death from foodborne illness.

HOW IS LISTERIA SPREAD?
Listeria occurs naturally in soil and water; a deadly germ that is hard to control. It is challenging to control for several reasons. If someone eats food contaminated with Listeria, sickness or miscarriage may not occur until weeks later when it is difficult to identify the food source. It can contaminate foods that we don’t usually cook, like deli meats, cheeses and fruits. Unlike most bacteria that do not like cold temperatures, Listeria thrives in refrigerator temperatures. It can hide unnoticed in the equipment or appliances where food is prepared, including factories, delis, grocery stores and restaurants.

According to Dr. Joellen Feirtag, U of M Extension Food Technologist, “The main source of listeria in ready-to-eat food products is from the environment in the food processing facility. Lack of proper cleaning and sanitation is always the cause of a recall or outbreak. Having an “Effective and Validated” Sanitation Program is essential in controlling the contamination of food products.”

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF LISTERIA?
The most common symptoms include fever, muscle aches, nausea and vomiting, and sometimes, diarrhea. If the infection spreads to the nervous system, symptoms may include headache, stiff neck, confusion, loss of balance, and convulsions.

Symptoms usually begin about three weeks after eating the bacteria. People who are not in the high-risk categories usually have mild to no symptoms from the infection.
HOW CAN LISTERIA BE REDUCED IN FOOD FACILITIES?

- If notified of a recall, take immediate action to pull the product from use and follow instructions from the distributor to dispose of or return the recalled items.
- Practice good cleaning and sanitizing procedures. Wash hands, countertops, cutting boards and utensils before handling and preparing all foods. Remember all food contact surfaces must be washed, rinsed, sanitized and air-dried between prep of raw items and ready-to-eat items.
- *Listeria monocytogenes* thrive in moist environments. Clean and sanitize sink and floor drains daily. During cleaning, be careful not to splash onto food contact surfaces.
- Practice strict time and temperature controls in all areas of your business.
- *Listeria monocytogenes* can grow in foods in the refrigerator. Have at least one refrigerator thermometer inside each cooling unit to monitor the air temp. All refrigeration must be 40˚F or lower and freezers, 0˚F or lower. A best practice for temperature of coolers is to maintain a temp of 36-37˚F to allow for temperature fluctuations. You need to monitor your equipment and the internal temperature of the food that’s held, to know what’s best in your establishment.
- Rinse all fruits and vegetables thoroughly under running water before eating, cutting or cooking. Even if the produce will be peeled and cooked, it should still be washed first.
- Scrub firm produce such as melons and cucumbers, with a clean produce brush. Dry with paper towels. Once produce is cut promptly refrigerate, for no more than 7 days.
- Separate raw meat, fish, poultry and eggs from fruits, vegetables, cooked foods and ready-to-eat foods.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PEOPLE AT HIGH-RISK FOR LISTERIA

People at high-risk for *Listeria* include pregnant women and their newborns, people 65 or older, or those with weakened immune systems. The following recommendations should be followed:

- Do not eat hot dogs, luncheon meats, cold cuts or deli meats unless they are heated to a minimum internal temperature of 165˚F.
- Do not eat soft cheeses (feta, queso blanco, queso fresco, brie, Camembert) unless they have labels that clearly state they are made from pasteurized milk. Be aware that Mexican-style cheeses made from pasteurized milk, such as queso fresco that was likely contaminated during cheese-making, have caused *Listeria* infections.
- Do not drink raw milk or eat foods that contain raw milk.
- Do not eat refrigerated smoked seafood unless it is an ingredient in a cooked dish, such as a casserole.
- Do not eat refrigerated pates and meat spreads from a deli or meat counter or from the refrigerated section of a store. Foods that do not need refrigeration, like canned or shelf-stable pates and meat spreads may be eaten.


RESOURCES TO CHECK OUT

Information from the Center for Disease Control (CDC) about all things related to *Listeria*: [http://www.cdc.gov/listeria/](http://www.cdc.gov/listeria/)


CLASS SCHEDULE: 2014 FOOD MANAGER CERTIFICATION AND RENEWAL

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For more class information: [www.extension.umn.edu/foodsafety](http://www.extension.umn.edu/foodsafety)
or call 507-337-2819 or email schwaw047@umn.edu