

Cook foods thoroughly

Listeria bacteria are killed by heating, so cook and reheat foods thoroughly.



Cook foods thoroughly to at least 75°C or hotter.



If reheating food make sure it is reheated until steaming hot.

Keep foods chilled

Listeria bacteria can grow at low temperatures. Keep food cold in the fridge below 5°C.



Keep your fridge as cold as possible (below 5°C).



Refrigerate all food, including leftovers, as soon as the food is cool enough to touch.



Throw out food left at room temperature for more than 4 hours, especially in summer.



Defrost frozen food in your fridge or microwave, rather than on a bench at room temperature.

Treatment and further advice

People with Listeria infection usually require hospitalisation and treatment with intravenous antibiotics.

If you are unwell contact your doctor or *healthdirect* on 1800 022 222 (open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week) as soon as possible.

Ask your doctor for more information if you are concerned that you are at risk.

For further advice about safe food handling contact:

Food Team
Environmental Health Directorate
Department of Health
Telephone: (08) 9222 2000
Email: foodsafety@health.wa.gov.au

For more food safety tips visit:

www.healthywa.wa.gov.au/foodsafety

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Produced by Environmental Health
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Department of
Health

Listeria infection and food safety



ENV-009672 MAR'24

What is Listeria infection?

Listeria infection (also known as listeriosis) is a rare but potentially serious illness caused by eating food contaminated with Listeria bacteria.

Listeria bacteria are found in the environment and can sometimes contaminate certain foods that have not been thoroughly cooked or properly prepared or stored.

Symptoms of Listeria infection

Symptoms vary but may include fever and chills, headache, stiff neck and sensitivity to light, confusion and drowsiness, muscle aches and pains, nausea and/or diarrhoea.

Symptoms usually occur around 3 weeks after eating contaminated food but this can vary between a few days and 2 months.

Healthy people and pregnant women may have mild or no symptoms, but Listeria infection may still cause miscarriage, premature birth or stillbirth.

Listeria infection can cause serious illnesses including meningitis (infection of the membrane surrounding the brain and spinal cord) and septicaemia (blood infection that can spread through the body). Babies born with Listeria infection can develop septicaemia or meningitis.

Who is at risk?

People most at risk include:

- pregnant women and their unborn or newborn babies
- anyone whose immune system has been weakened due to chronic illness including cancer, diabetes, alcoholism, or medications that impair immunity such as steroids and anti-cancer drugs.

Reducing your risk of infection

- Avoid foods that may be contaminated with Listeria (see list below of high risk foods), and choose safer food options.
- Prepare and store food safely (keep clean, keep food separate, cook foods thoroughly, and chill foods).
- Make sure you [Play it Food Safe](#).

High risk foods

Some foods are high risk for Listeria and may be contaminated with Listeria bacteria during manufacturing and the bacteria can continue to grow at refrigerator temperatures.

Foods to avoid eating include:

- Pâté
- Cold cooked chicken
- Cold meats (including polony, ham, salami)
- Soft cheeses (such as brie, camembert, fetta, ricotta)
- Pre-packed, pre-prepared or self-serve fruit or vegetable salads
- Freshly squeezed fruit and vegetable juices
- Cold, smoked or raw seafood, (such as salmon, oysters, sashimi, cooked prawns)
- Sushi
- Unpasteurised milk and unpasteurised milk products
- Soft serve ice cream and thick shakes.

Keep clean



Wash your hands thoroughly with soap and warm water before and after handling foods, and after handling soil or manure in the garden.



Wash cooking equipment such as chopping boards and knives with hot, soapy water before using, and between handling raw, cooked and different types of foods.



Keep your fridge clean and clean up any spills.



Wash fruit and vegetables, including herbs, especially before eating them raw, as they can be contaminated with Listeria from the soil they are grown in.

Keep foods separate



Keep raw food (meat, chicken, seafood and eggs) separate from cooked and ready-to-eat food like salads and fruit.



Use separate cutting boards and knives for each type of food and especially for raw, cooked and ready-to-eat foods.



Always wrap or cover food to prevent it being contaminated by bacteria.