

Food Safety

Listeria Basics

What is *Listeria*?



- *Listeria monocytogenes* (Lis-TEER-ee-ah mon-o-sy-TOJ-en-eez) is a pathogen that, when eaten, may cause a serious foodborne illness called *listeriosis* (lis-teer-ee-O-sis).

Where is *Listeria* found?



- Everywhere, including on plants and animals.
- In raw food materials or inadequately processed food.
- On floors and in floor drains, coolers, door seals, air vents, walls, and grease traps.
- On storage containers, preparation surfaces and equipment, and display cases.

Why is it important that people know about *Listeria*?



- Each year, approximately 2,500 people contract listeriosis and it is estimated that 500 die.
- Anyone can be affected. It's particularly dangerous to:
 - Pregnant women
 - Fetuses
 - Newborns
 - The elderly
 - People with lowered immunity
- Symptoms may be *mild*:
 - Fever
 - Fatigue
 - Nausea
- Symptoms may be *serious*:
 - Spinal meningitis
 - Miscarriage
 - Blood infection in newborns

What's important for retail supermarket deli or bakery associates to know?



- *Listeria* easily cross-contaminates raw materials or inadequately processed food.
- Heat or chemicals can destroy *Listeria*, but food may become contaminated after processing.
- It grows, although slowly, at refrigeration temperatures.
- Adequate cleaning of retail environment and good personal hygiene are important control measures for *Listeria*.

Which foods most often harbor *Listeria*?



- Seafood salad
 - Smoked seafood
 - Deli salads
 - Blue-veined cheese
 - Mold-ripened cheese
 - Lunch meat
 - Lettuce salads
 - Soft fresh cheese
- Any food, however, can be cross-contaminated with *Listeria*.

Sources: Kathleen Glass, associate director, Food Research Institute, University of Wisconsin-Madison. Catherine Cutter, Dana McElroy, Stephanie Penn, [Control of *Listeria monocytogenes* in Retail Establishments](#), Penn State College of Agricultural Sciences, Agricultural Research and Cooperative Extension, the USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service, and the Association of Food and Drug Officials, 2006.

Also see *Listeria* podcasts at <http://iddba.org/iddbacast.aspx>.

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