

What is listeriosis?

Listeriosis is an uncommon bacterial infection. It can cause infection in the brain or blood stream, abortion in pregnant women, symptoms as mild as flu-like illness, or no symptoms at all. *Listeriosis* is found in soil, cattle forage, water, mud and silage. Other sources are infected domestic and wild mammals, fowl and people.

Who is at risk for listeriosis?

Anyone can get listeriosis, but it is seen more often in newborns, the elderly, people with diseases of the immune system and pregnant women.

How do you get listeriosis?

Listeriosis is associated with drinking raw or contaminated milk, soft cheeses, contaminated vegetables, and uncooked ready-to-eat meats. Newborns can get the infection from the mother before birth or as they pass through the birth canal.

What are the symptoms of listeriosis infection?

People infected with listeriosis may have an acute, mild illness with a fever, or infection of the brain or fluid surrounding the brain causing sudden fever, intense headache, nausea and vomiting, delirium, and coma. People may also have an infection in the heart muscle or lesions in the liver or skin.

How soon do symptoms appear?

Symptoms have occurred anywhere from 3 - 70 days following an exposure. The average time frame to disease is about 3 weeks.

How long will symptoms of listeriosis last?

Mothers of infected newborn infants may shed the infectious agent in vaginal discharges and urine for 7 - 10 days after delivery. However, some infected individuals may shed the organisms in their stools for several months.

Do infected people need to be excluded from work or school?

Since listeriosis is found in the feces (stool), people with diarrhea (especially children in child care centers or people who handle food) should not go to school or work. Most infected people may return when their diarrhea stops if they carefully wash their hands after using the toilet, diapering, and before handling food.

What is used to treat listeriosis?

Antibiotics can be used to treat listeriosis.

How can listeriosis be prevented?

Recommendations for all individuals

1. Keep uncooked meats separate from vegetables, cooked foods and ready-to-eat foods.
2. Thoroughly wash raw vegetables before eating.
3. Avoid raw/unpasteurized milk or foods made from raw milk.
4. Wash hands, knives, and cutting boards after handling uncooked foods.
5. Read and follow label instructions to "keep refrigerated" and "use by" a certain date.

Recommendations to high risk individuals

Persons at increased risk for listeriosis such as pregnant women, the elderly, and those with immunosuppressive conditions can decrease the risk if they:

1. Avoid unpasteurized soft cheeses such as feta, Brie, Camembert and blue cheese.
2. Thoroughly heat leftover foods or ready-to-eat foods such as hot dogs or processed luncheon meats before eating.
3. Although the risk of listeriosis associated with foods from delicatessen counters is relatively low, pregnant women and immunosuppressed persons may choose to avoid these foods or to thoroughly reheat cold cuts before eating.