

*North Carolina Women's Hospital*  
**Safety Facts for a Healthy Pregnancy**  
**Listeriosis**

**What is Listeriosis?**

Listeriosis is a disease caused by the bacteria known as *Listeria monocytogenes* (*Listeria*). This disease can cause miscarriage, premature birth, stillbirth, and problems for your baby after birth. It can also cause infections to the brain tissues and seizures in older adults and persons with chronic illnesses.

**How does a person get listeriosis?**

Eating food contaminated with *Listeria* causes most listeriosis infections in humans. *Listeria* is a bacteria that exists everywhere in our environment – in the soil, groundwater, and on plants. Although most people who come in contact with *Listeria* do not get sick, pregnant women are at greater risk because of immune changes in pregnancy.

**What can I do to prevent Listeriosis?**

The United States Food and Drug Administration (FDA) advises you to do these things to decrease the chances of infection:

- Wash raw vegetables before eating.
- Wash hands, knives and cutting board after handling uncooked foods.
- Consume fruits and vegetables and ready-to-eat foods as soon as possible.
- Do not eat hot dogs, deli meats, and luncheon meats unless they are heated to be steaming hot.
- Avoid getting fluid from hot dog packages on other foods, utensils and food preparation surfaces, and wash hands after handling hot dogs, luncheon meats, and deli meats.
- Do not eat soft cheese such as feta, Brie, Camembert, blue-veined cheeses or fresh Mexican-style cheeses like queso blanco, queso fresco. However, you can eat hard cheeses, such as cheddar, semi-soft cheese such as mozzarella, pasteurized processed cheese slices and spreads, cream cheese, and cottage cheese.
- Do not eat refrigerated, smoked seafood unless it is as an ingredient in a cooked dish like a casserole. Refrigerated smoked seafood, such as salmon, trout, whitefish, cod, tuna or mackerel, is most often labeled as “nova-style”, “kippered”, “smoked” or “jerky”. The fish is found in the refrigerator section or sold at deli counters of grocery stores and delicatessens. Canned or shelf-stable smoked seafood may be eaten.
- Do not drink raw (non-pasteurized) milk or eat foods made with raw milk products.

**How will I know if I have Listeriosis?**

Listeria causes symptoms similar to the flu, such as chills, fever, muscle aches and upset stomach or diarrhea. These symptoms can be mild and can come on gradually over several days or weeks. Your health care provider can do a blood test to see if you have listeriosis.

**Can Listeriosis be treated?**

Listeriosis can be treated with an antibiotic. Usually, this prevents infection in the fetus. Babies who are born with listeriosis can be treated with antibiotics as well. The safest choice is to prevent infection so that neither you nor your baby need medicines for this disease.

*Approved by NC Women's Hospital Patient Education Committee June, 2003; revised January, 2008.*