

# Listeria



食物環境衛生署  
Food and Environmental  
Hygiene Department





## What is Listeria

*Listeria monocytogenes* is a kind of bacteria commonly found in nature (e.g. soil, water) and may be found in some foods. Such bacteria can survive and multiply at temperature as low as  $-0.4^{\circ}\text{C}$ , but it can be easily destroyed at normal cooking temperature. Eating foods contaminated by the bacteria may result in listeria infection (listeriosis).

## Signs and Symptoms of Listeria Infection (Listeriosis)

The disease symptoms are variable and depend on the individual's susceptibility. Flu-like symptoms such as fever, headache, vomiting, diarrhoea may occur from 12 hours to a few days after eating contaminated foods, but symptoms may develop only after weeks. Although listeriosis is uncommonly reported in Hong Kong and causes few or no symptoms in healthy people, it can be very dangerous for pregnant women, newborns, the elderly and people with low immunity. In serious cases, listeriosis can result in septicemia, meningitis and encephalitis. Infected pregnant women may transmit the bacteria to their foetuses, leading to miscarriage, still birth, premature birth or serious illnesses in the newborn baby.



## Preventive Measures

### 1. Choose Safe Food

- Pregnant women, the elderly and people with low immunity should avoid the high risk foods. Foods that may contain listeria are mostly chilled ready-to-eat foods and refrigerated foods. These include:

- ◆ soft cheeses
  - ◆ ready cooked, cold chickens (whole or sliced)
  - ◆ cold meats
  - ◆ pates
  - ◆ prepared and stored salads (such as salads in salad bars of restaurants, supermarkets or delicatessens)
  - ◆ raw seafoods (such as sashimi and oysters)
  - ◆ smoked seafoods (such as smoked salmon)
  - ◆ unpasteurised milk
  - ◆ foods made from unpasteurised milk
- Check that the food package is intact and the expiry date on the label is not overdue.
  - Do not buy foods and drinks from illegal hawkers.



## 2. Store foods properly

- Store hot foods at 60°C or above.
- Keep perishable foods, such as meat, milk and egg products, in refrigerator at 4°C or below.
- Put ready-to-eat foods at upper compartments and raw foods at lower compartments of a refrigerator to avoid cross contamination.



### 3. Practise good food and personal hygiene

- Wash raw vegetables and fruits thoroughly before eating.
- Thaw frozen foods in refrigerator. Do not thaw at room temperature.
- Cook raw foods thoroughly.
- Re-heat leftover foods thoroughly.
- Separate raw foods from cooked foods. Cooked foods should be covered properly to avoid cross contamination.
- Use separate equipment to handle raw and cooked foods. Wash equipment and hands thoroughly after handling raw foods.
- Wash hands thoroughly after visiting toilet and before and after food preparation.



## Enquiries

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Source of photo:

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