

Listeriosis and Pregnancy

Pregnant women are about 10 times more likely than other people to get listeriosis.

Listeriosis is a rare but serious infection caused by eating food contaminated with bacteria called *Listeria*. Listeriosis mostly affects pregnant women, newborns, older adults, and people with weakened immune systems. About 1 in 6 cases of listeriosis are associated with pregnancy.

Pregnant women typically experience only fever and other flu-like symptoms, such as fatigue and muscle aches. However, infections during pregnancy can lead to miscarriage, stillbirth, premature delivery, or life-threatening infection of the newborn.

In general, you can protect yourself from listeriosis by following these guidelines:

- Avoid eating cheese made from raw (unpasteurized) milk. Soft cheeses made with pasteurized milk, including commercial cottage cheese, cream cheese, and mozzarella, are generally regarded as safe.
- Avoid raw (unpasteurized) milk and products made from it, such as cheese, ice cream, and yogurt. Look for the word "pasteurized" on the label. If in doubt, don't buy it!
- Do not eat raw or lightly cooked sprouts of any kind (including alfalfa, clover, radish, and mung bean sprouts).
- Eat cut melon right away or refrigerate it at 40°F or colder and for no more than 7 days. Throw away cut melons left at room temperature for more than 4 hours.
- Avoid eating hot dogs, lunch meats, cold cuts, other deli meats (such as bologna), or fermented or dry sausages unless they are heated to an internal temperature of 165°F or until steaming hot just before serving. Don't let juice from hot dog and lunch meat packages get on other foods, utensils, and food preparation surfaces. Wash hands after handling hot dogs, lunch meats, and deli meats.
- Do not eat refrigerated pâté or meat spreads from a deli or meat counter or from the refrigerated section of a store. Foods that do not need refrigeration, like canned or shelf-stable pâté and meat spreads, are safe to eat. Refrigerate these foods after opening.
- Do not eat refrigerated smoked seafood unless it is in a cooked dish, such as a casserole, or unless it is canned or shelf-stable.



If you are pregnant and Hispanic, your risk of getting listeriosis is even greater. Pregnant Hispanic women are about 24 times more likely than other people to get listeriosis. Be aware that some Hispanic-style cheeses, such as queso fresco, that were made from pasteurized milk but were contaminated when the cheese was being made, have caused *Listeria* infections. Hispanic-style soft cheeses include queso fresco, queso blanco, queso Cotija, queso panela, queso ranchero, cuajada en terrón, and others. Learn about additional ways to reduce your risk for listeriosis.

If you are pregnant and have a fever and other symptoms of possible listeriosis, such as fatigue and muscle aches, within two months after eating a possibly contaminated food, you should seek medical care and tell the doctor about eating possibly contaminated food. If you are infected, your health care provider can give you antibiotics that can protect your fetus or newborn. If you ate food possibly contaminated with *Listeria* and do not feel sick, most experts believe you do not need tests or treatment, even if you are in a group that is more likely to get listeriosis.