

9 Where can I get further information?

For more information on Listeriosis or any other infectious diseases, please consult your health care professional.

You can also contact an Environmental Health Officer at the Council on 6429 8900 or e-mail admin@centralcoast.tas.gov.au

Listeriosis

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1 What is Listeriosis?

Listeria is a bacterium that causes illness in humans. It is significant to public health because it can grow at refrigeration temperatures. Although this illness is not common in Australia, there have been three large outbreaks of Listeriosis worldwide since the 1980s, involving a total of 232 people.

2 Who does it commonly affect?

Listeriosis primarily affects immunocompromised individuals, the elderly, pregnant women and their fetuses, newborn babies, and people on immunosuppressive drugs.

3 How do I get Listeriosis?

The main mode of transmission for Listeria infection is through the ingestion of contaminated foods. Other modes of transmission include mother to foetus via the placenta, or at birth.

4 What is the incubation period?

The incubation period for Listeria infection is mostly unknown. The average incubation period based on world-wide outbreaks is estimated to be three weeks.

5 What are the common symptoms?

Healthy adults are generally not affected, but may experience mild flu-like symptoms.

Infection in pregnant women may only be mild before or during birth, but the bacterium can be transmitted through the placenta to the foetus, which can result in stillbirth or premature birth. Babies can be severely affected with conditions such as meningitis or septicaemia. It has been reported that one third of people infected with Listeriosis have died.

6 What treatment is available?

Treatment of this illness usually involves antibiotics. More information on treatment options can be obtained from your Medical Practitioner.

7 How can I prevent infection?

People in high risk groups need to be aware of possible food sources of this illness. These people should avoid the following foods:

- ✓ Ready-to-eat seafood (i.e. sushi, smoked fish, oysters);
- ✓ Pre-prepared salads (i.e. coleslaw, fruit salad);
- ✓ Drinks made from fresh fruit or vegetables where washing procedures are unknown;
- ✓ Pre-cooked meat products which are eaten without further cooking (i.e. deli meat, cooked diced chicken);
- ✓ Unpasteurised milk or dairy products;
- ✓ Soft serve ice-creams;
- ✓ Soft cheeses (i.e. brie, ricotta);
- ✓ Dips and salad dressings;
- ✓ Raw vegetable garnishes.

Safe foods include:

- ✓ Freshly prepared foods;
- ✓ Freshly cooked foods, to be eaten immediately;
- ✓ Hard cheeses, processed cheese or cheese spreads;
- ✓ Pasteurised milk;
- ✓ Yoghurt;
- ✓ Canned and pickled foods.

Good personal hygiene is also very important and should include washing hands before handling foods. Basic food safety measures should also be observed. These include storing high risk foods under 5°C, keeping food covered, thoroughly cooking food and adequately washing utensils with hot soapy water.

7 What is the role of the Environmental Health Officer

If you are experiencing gastroenteritis symptoms you are encouraged to seek medical advice. Your medical practitioner may take a faecal sample, which is to be sent away for testing in a laboratory to determine the pathogen that is causing your illness.

The State's Department of Health and Human Services will contact your local council to inform them of the result. An Environmental Health Officer will contact you to conduct a routine confidential interview in an attempt to identify a possible cause of your illness. This interview will also determine if there is a possible link between other cases.