



A Guide for Consumers on How to Control *Listeria monocytogenes*

In Refrigerated Ready-To-Eat Foods

Refrigerated Ready-to-Eat Foods

Meats

- Fresh paté and other meat spreads
- Commercially packaged or deli lunch meats
- Hot dogs, if eaten unheated

Fish and Seafood

- Smoked fish
- Refrigerated cooked or smoked seafood and fish

Dairy Foods

- Soft cheeses made with raw milk
- Raw or unpasteurized milk

Deli-style Salads

- Any type made with risky food ingredients — like seafood, either home-made or commercial

Vegetables

- Unwashed, raw vegetables (especially lettuce or cabbage)
- Raw salad sprouts

Listeria monocytogenes is a bacterium that causes a foodborne disease called listeriosis. It may grow in some foods in the refrigerator.

Cooking destroys the bacteria.

Refrigerated ready-to-eat foods are perishable foods designed to be eaten without cooking, like deli salads, cheese, and hot dogs.

Listeria monocytogenes can grow in refrigerated ready-to-eat foods. It can cause listeriosis in people, especially those who may have reduced immune systems, like pregnant women, cancer patients, or the elderly. Shelf stable ready to eat foods, like crackers, do not need to be refrigerated and are not risky.

Risky foods require special care when you handle them. Sometimes, they may need to be avoided altogether.

Foodborne disease can lead to very serious side effects. It can even cause death.

Each year, there are about 2,500 cases of listeriosis in the United States. Some people will die from the disease.

While your best bet against listeriosis is not to eat a risky food, this may be easier said than done.

Read on for some tips to help guard your safety when you do eat these foods.

Safe Refrigerator Storage

Product	Storage Instructions
Fresh Prepared by the Grocery or At Home (like deli salads)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Store in refrigerator • Be sure refrigerator temperature is 35°F-40°F • Discard 4 days after preparation if the food can't be frozen or cooked to steaming hot
Commercially Packaged (like lunch meat or hot dogs)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Freeze or store in refrigerator • Be sure refrigerator temperature is 35°F- 40°F • Discard 4 days after purchase if the food can't be frozen or cooked to steaming hot



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Meats, Lunch Meats and Hot Dogs

- Heat dogs to *steaming hot** or 165° F before eating. This destroys any *Listeria monocytogenes* in the food. At-risk consumers should also heat lunch meat before eating.
- At risk consumers should not eat fresh paté or fresh meat spreads. Canned paté or meat spread is safer.
- In the grocery store, check the “sell-by” or “use-by” date on the package before you purchase. Don’t buy if close to the sell-by or use-by date.
- If you eat sliced meats from a deli (such as bologna, roast beef, turkey or ham), ask what the date is on the original packaging before you buy .
- Make sure employees at the store are wearing disposable gloves while they cut or handle deli meats.
- Once home, wrap food well and date packages. Refrigerate ready-to-eat foods right away.
- Store risky foods away from other foods to prevent cross-contaminating other foods.
- Freeze risky foods that you don’t plan to eat within 4 days of purchase or preparation. If the food can’t be frozen or reheated before eating, discard after 4 days in refrigerator.

Fish and Seafood

- Do not eat cold smoked fish, or raw or undercooked seafood. Canned or fish heated to steaming hot is safer.

Dairy Foods

- Soft cheeses should be made from pasteurized milk. If you aren’t sure or if the package label is not clear, avoid buying that product.
- Sometimes locally-made cheeses, like queso fresco, are made with unpasteurized milk. This is a very risky food for people who immune suppressed.
- Soft cheeses like Feta, Brie, Camembert, or blue-veined cheeses may be made with raw milk. Unless the label says made with pasteurized milk, do not eat these cheeses.
- Fresh cheeses made with pasteurized milk, like cream or cottage cheese, are safe to eat. Aged cheeses, like cheddar or Swiss, are also safe to eat.

Deli-style Salads

- If you use a high risk ingredient in a deli-style salad, such as smoked seafood or cabbage, the salad is risky.
- Both home-made or store-made deli-style salads can be risky if risky ingredients are used.
- Store-bought mayonnaise itself is not a risky food for at risk consumers. Just follow typical food safety advice and refrigerate all salads made with mayonnaise.

Vegetables

- Wash all raw vegetables with cold running water before eating.
- Do not eat raw salad sprouts, like alfalfa sprouts.

***Listeria monocytogenes* can be in refrigerated ready-to-eat foods. It can cause foodborne illness, especially in people who may have a suppressed immune system, like pregnant women, cancer patients, or the elderly**



* What Is “Steaming Hot?”

... when steam rises from the food item itself. It is important to make sure the steam you see is NOT coming from the water or the cookware that you are using. Steam from water or the cookware is NOT a sign of safe food.

For more information visit these web sites:

USDA/FDA Foodborne Illness Education Information Center—www.nal.usda.gov/foodborne/index.html

Government Food Safety Information— www.foodsafety.gov

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention — www.cdc.gov/foodsafety

Funded by USDA, National Integrated Food Safety Initiative , Research Grant # 2005-02118

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Project Team Leaders: Lydia Medeiros and Gang Chen (The Ohio State University), Val Hillers and Verna Bergmann (Washington State University) Pat Kendall and Mary Schroeder (Colorado State University) Author: Lydia Medeiros

We gratefully acknowledge the continued help and financial support of our local county commissioners.

We appreciate their input and participation in our programming efforts.

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Keith L. Smith, Associate Vice President for Agricultural Administration and Director, Ohio State University Extension