

## **Listeria**

This leaflet tries to answer some of the questions you might have about *Listeria* infection.

### **What is it?**

The bacteria *Listeria monocytogenes*, which is commonly found in vegetation, water, soil, dust, mud and sewage, cause the infection. It is also found in the faeces of humans and animals, so it is difficult to avoid

### **What are the symptoms?**

Most people may have mild ‘flu-like’ symptoms or may be no symptoms at all.

For the very young, the elderly, pregnant women and those already suffering illnesses the symptoms can be severe:

- fever;
- headache;
- sickness;
- diarrhoea; and
- even miscarriage or still-birth.

The symptoms may take anything from 3 to 70 days to develop; on average it is usually about 3 weeks

### **What about the mess?**

- If you have to clear up diarrhoea or other mess, take care and wear rubber gloves. Scoop up what you can with a dustpan or paper towel. Rinse down a WC, don't use a sink that is used for food preparation or washing up. Wash what is left with cloths, and warm soapy water. Pour dirty water down a WC afterwards. Clean all cloths and equipment with dilute bleach (1 eggcup in a small bucket of warm (not hot) water.)

- Wash fouled sheets and clothing straight away. (Before washing fold sheets and clothes so that you don't touch the dirty parts);
- Household hygiene is important, disinfect the WC area particularly the flush handle and basin taps and light switches. Ordinary bathroom cleaners are fine; and
- Make sure everyone uses his or her own towel and face cloth.

### **How did I catch it?**

The usual way is eating or drinking something containing *Listeria* bacteria. Foods such as:

- unpasteurised milk;
  - soft cheese made from unpasteurised milk;
  - contaminated vegetables;
  - cook chill ready-to-eat meals which require heating
- are all possible sources of infection.

### **How long does it last?**

The illness may last for 7-10 days depending on the individual.

### **How is it treated?**

In most cases, symptoms clear without treatment. Vulnerable people may be prescribed anti-biotics. It is important to keep drinking (water or dilute squash are a good idea) to stop dehydration.

### **Can I give it to some one else?**

It is possible to pass the illness on, but this is rare. Good personal hygiene will reduce the risk of passing it on to others

### **When can I go back to work/school/nursery?**

If you work with food, are under 5 years old attending school/nursery or care for vulnerable people you should stay away until your symptoms have stopped for 48 hours. You must still maintain good personal hygiene when you return.

## ***What can I do to prevent getting it again?***

### **1. Food**

- If you are ill avoid preparing food for yourself or others;
- Pregnant women should avoid soft cheeses and meat based pâté;
- Be careful not to spread the organism from raw to ready-to-eat food such as cold meats and salad by separating them in the fridge and taking care when handling and preparing them;
- Always wash foods that are to be eaten raw, such as fruit, salad and vegetables;
- Clean and disinfect worktops after preparing raw foods; and
- Make sure your fridge and freezer are working properly. The temperatures should be 1-4<sup>0</sup>C and minus 18<sup>0</sup>C respectively. (If you do not have a fridge thermometer, why not buy one).

### **2. Wash your hands**

Everyone in the household (including children) should take care to wash their hands properly with soap and rinse them under running water after you've used the toilet and ...

- after you have cleared up vomit or diarrhoea;
- after you have been nursing ill people;
- after you have handled laundry or changed nappies;
- before you eat or cook; and
- often during the preparation of food (especially after handling raw meat and raw eggs).

As an extra precaution you can use an antibacterial soap.

### ***For further information contact***

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## **The Facts about**

# **Listeria**



**North Yorkshire  
Food Liaison Group**

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