

Pregnant or older? Be Safe with ready-to-eat meats



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Cook-outs and picnics are great ways to share quality time with friends and family. However, it's important to know that ready-to-eat hot dogs, lunch meats, and cold cuts may not be safe for certain groups of people. These and certain other foods can be contaminated with the bacteria *Listeria*, which causes listeriosis, a serious disease that primarily affects older adults, adults with weakened immune systems, pregnant women and newborns.

In the United States, an estimated 1,600 people become seriously ill with listeriosis each year and 260 die. Healthy children and adults occasionally get infected with *Listeria*, but they rarely become seriously ill.

The following groups have a higher risk of listeriosis:

- **Pregnant women:** Pregnant women are about 20 times more likely than other healthy adults to get listeriosis. About one in six (17 percent) cases of listeriosis occurs during pregnancy.
- **Newborns:** Newborns suffer the most serious effects of infection in pregnancy.
- **Persons with weakened immune systems** from transplants or certain diseases, therapies, or medications.
- **Persons with cancer, diabetes, alcoholism, liver or kidney disease.**
- **Persons with AIDS:** They are almost 300 times more likely to get listeriosis than people with normal immune systems.
- **Older adults**

Listeria is killed by pasteurization and cooking, but some ready-to-eat foods, such as hot dogs and deli meats, can be contaminated after factory processing.

For those in the high risk groups, CDC recommends the following precautions:

- Do not eat hot dogs, luncheon meats, cold cuts, or other deli meats unless they are heated to an internal temperature of 165°F or until steaming hot.
- Do not eat refrigerated pâté or meat spreads from a deli or meat counter or from the refrigerated section of a store.
- Do not eat soft cheese such as feta, queso blanco, queso fresco, brie, Camembert, blue-veined, or panela (queso panela) unless it is labeled as made with pasteurized milk.
- Do not eat refrigerated smoked seafood, unless it is contained in a cooked dish, such as a casserole, or unless it is a canned or shelf-stable product. Refrigerated smoked seafood, such as salmon, trout, whitefish, cod, tuna, and mackerel, is most often labeled as "nova-style," "lox," "kippered," "smoked," or "jerky." Canned and shelf stable tuna, salmon, and other fish products are safe to eat. "

It is important for everyone to use precooked or ready-to-eat food as soon as you can. Do not store the product in the refrigerator beyond the use-by date. Follow USDA refrigerator storage time guidelines:

- **Hot Dogs** – store opened package no longer than 1 week and unopened package no longer than 2 weeks in the refrigerator.
- **Luncheon and Deli Meat** – store factory-sealed, unopened package no longer than 2 weeks. Store opened packages and meat sliced at a local deli no longer than 3 to 5 days in the refrigerator.

Listeriosis is a serious disease that can result in death, even with prompt treatment. Death caused by listeriosis is particularly likely in older adults, people with weakened immune systems or other medical conditions, and fetuses and newborn babies. Take the necessary precautions to make sure you and your loved ones do not get infected.

For more information on foods to avoid and how to safely prepare and refrigerate food, visit

<http://www.cdc.gov/listeria/>
www.foodsafety.gov