



Food Safety and  
Inspection Service

## HOW TO HANDLE REFRIGERATED READY-TO-EAT FOODS AND AVOID LISTERIOSIS

*Listeria monocytogenes* is a bacterium that can cause a serious infection in humans called listeriosis, that results in an estimated 2,500 serious illnesses and 500 deaths each year. Foodborne illness caused by *L.*

*monocytogenes* in pregnant women can result in miscarriage, fetal death, and severe illness or death of a newborn infant. Others at risk for severe illness or death are older adults and those with weakened immune systems.

Because *L. monocytogenes* can grow at refrigerator temperatures and is found in ready-to-eat foods, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and the Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) are advising all consumers to reduce the risk of illness by:

- Using perishable items that are precooked or ready-to-eat as soon as possible;
- Cleaning their refrigerators regularly; and
- Using a refrigerator thermometer to make sure that the refrigerator always stays at 40 degrees F or below.

Since **pregnant women, older adults, and people with weakened immune systems are at higher risk** for listeriosis, FDA and FSIS are providing the following advice to those at-risk consumers of foods that have a greater likelihood of containing *Listeria monocytogenes*:

- **Do not eat** hot dogs and luncheon meats, unless they are reheated until steaming hot.
- **Do not eat** soft cheese such as Feta, Brie, and Camembert cheeses, blue-veined cheeses, and Mexican-style cheeses such as "queso blanco fresco."

Cheeses that may be eaten include hard cheese; semi-soft cheeses such as mozzarella; pasteurized processed cheeses such as slices and spreads; cream cheese; and cottage cheese.

- **Do not eat** refrigerated pates or meat spreads. Canned or shelf-stable pates and meat spreads may be eaten.
- **Do not eat** refrigerated smoked seafood, unless it is contained in a cooked dish, such as a casserole. Refrigerated smoked seafood, such as salmon, trout, whitefish, cod, tuna, or mackerel, is most often labeled as "nova-style," "lox," "kippered," "smoked," or "jerky." The fish is found in the refrigerator section or sold at deli counters of grocery stores and delicatessens. Canned or shelf-stable smoked seafood may be eaten.
- **Do not drink** raw (unpasteurized) milk **or eat** foods that contain unpasteurized milk.

To keep food safe from harmful bacteria, follow these four simple steps:

**Clean:** Wash hands and surfaces often

**Separate:** Don't cross-contaminate

**Cook:** Cook to proper temperatures

**Chill:** Refrigerate promptly

### For More Information, Contact:

#### USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline

1 (800) 535-4555 or (202) 720-3333 (Washington, DC)

TTY: 1 (800) 256-7072

[www.fsis.usda.gov](http://www.fsis.usda.gov)

#### FDA Food Information Line

1 (888) SAFEFOOD

[www.cfsan.fda.gov](http://www.cfsan.fda.gov)