

Patient instructions: Listeria – information for patients

You have been diagnosed with listeriosis caused by the *Listeria* bacterium. People usually get a listeria infection most often by eating food **contaminated with the bacteria**. Listeria does not transmit from one person to another.

How ill a person becomes is affected by the amount of *Listeria* bacteria in the food and the person's own immune system. People who fall ill with listeriosis most often include those in risk groups: older people, pregnant people, newborns, and persons with reduced immunity due to illness or medication.

The most important high-risk foods are (see the [Finnish Food Authority](#) website for more information)

- Raw or poorly cooked meat or fish, roe
- Unwashed raw and fresh vegetables and root vegetables
- Unpasteurised dairy products (e.g. blue cheese and farmer's cheese)
- Unheated frozen vegetables.

How people in risk groups reduce the risk of developing listeriosis?

- Good food handling hygiene and heating food thoroughly can reduce the listeriosis risk of foods.
- Cook all meat and fish carefully.
- Wash raw and fresh vegetables before eating and before and after peeling.
- Keep uncooked meat separate from other products in the refrigerator.
- Avoid unpasteurised milk and dairy products.
- Wash hands, knives and cutting boards after handling uncooked foods with them.
- Make sure that the temperature in the refrigerator is sufficiently cold (max. +6 °C, for fish products +3 °C).
- Do not use products after their expiration date.
- Use opened products as soon as possible.

In addition, it is recommended that those in risk groups take special care with regard to food practices. For example, it is recommended that frozen vegetables are heated before use, and that leftovers and prepared meals are heated to a boil before eating.

Symptoms of listeriosis

Listeriosis symptoms may vary from person to person. Listeriosis can usually be asymptomatic or cause mild flu or stomach flu-like symptoms in healthy people. In people with weakened immunity, listeriosis is often manifests as meningitis or a severe general infection (sepsis). In pregnant people, the symptoms are similar to conventional fever. Listeriosis increases the risk of miscarriage or preterm delivery.

How is listeriosis diagnosed?

The *Listeria* bacteria may be detected in a blood culture, spinal fluid sample or other culture sample taken from the focus of infection. The patient is interviewed about the foods they have eaten, and the local health inspector may, with the patient's consent, take food samples from the patient's home for a listeria test. In this way, it can be determined which product could have caused the listeriosis.

Treatment of listeriosis

Listeriosis almost always requires intravenous antimicrobials, which are usually administered in a hospital. If a pregnant person has been diagnosed with listeriosis, early treatment with antibiotics may prevent fetal or neonatal infection.

More information: [THL](#) and the [Finnish Food Authority](#) websites.