

Listeria – keeping food safe

- In the UK, illness from *Listeria monocytogenes* (listeriosis) has increased, particularly among those people over 60 who have weakened immune systems. Although listeriosis isn't common, it can be life-threatening in people with reduced immunity. Listeriosis has sometimes been linked to eating chilled ready-to-eat foods, and controls are therefore needed to minimise the risk from this source.
- This factsheet highlights key control measures, which people involved in the preparation and supply of chilled ready-to-eat foods can take to minimise the risk of people developing listeriosis. Guidance on other important hygiene measures is available below.^{1,2}

Minimising the risk

Listeria can grow at refrigeration temperatures, so chilled foods must be kept cold and eaten by their 'use by' dates.

Keep chilled ready-to-eat food cold

- ◆ make sure the fridge is set at 5°C or below and working correctly
- ◆ foods taken out of chilled storage should be eaten within four hours – after that you should throw the food away
- ◆ maintain temperature control from production until serving

Storage – follow instructions on the label

- ◆ don't use food after its 'use by' date – make sure you check the label before serving
- ◆ use opened foods within two days, unless the manufacturer's instructions state otherwise

What is listeria?

- *Listeria monocytogenes* can cause severe and sometimes life-threatening foodborne illness.³ It usually affects vulnerable groups, such as pregnant women and people with weakened immunity, particularly those over 60. People with weakened immunity could include those who've had transplants, are taking drugs that weaken the immune system or who have cancers that affect their immune system, such as leukaemia or lymphoma.
- *Listeria monocytogenes* has been found in a range of chilled ready-to-eat foods, such as pre-packed sandwiches, pâté, butter, soft mould-ripened cheeses, cooked sliced meats and smoked salmon. Vulnerable people should avoid soft mould-ripened cheese, such as Camembert and Brie, soft blue cheese, and all types of pâté, including vegetable.

Further information

¹ *Food hygiene – a guide for businesses*. A general guide to the food hygiene regulations:

[food.gov.uk/multimedia/pdfs/hygienebusinessguide.pdf](https://www.food.gov.uk/multimedia/pdfs/hygienebusinessguide.pdf)

² *Food safety management packs*. Practical guides to food safety management systems:

[food.gov.uk/foodindustry/regulation/hygleg/hyglegresources](https://www.food.gov.uk/foodindustry/regulation/hygleg/hyglegresources)

³ *HPA listeria factsheet*. Further information on listeria and listeriosis:

www.hpa.org.uk/listeriafactsheet