
IN THIS ISSUE: 2024 LISTERIA OUTBREAK

2024 *Listeria* Outbreak – What to Know About Listeriosis

Introduction

Listeriosis is the infection caused by *Listeria monocytogenes*, a bacterium which contaminate many types of foods.¹ On February 5, 2024, the United States Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) issued an official recall of queso fresco and cotija cheeses manufactured by Rizo Lopez Foods, Inc., of Modesto, California.² This is an ongoing multistate outbreak and includes cases dating back to 2014. CDC investigated this outbreak in 2017 and again in 2021 due to epidemiological evidence, which identified queso fresco and similar cheeses as potential sources, however specific brand names were not able to be identified until the investigation was reopened in 2024.²

Details regarding potentially contaminated items impacted by this recall and ongoing updates can be found here: <https://www.fda.gov/safety/major-product-recalls/2024-recalls-food-products-associated-dairy-products-rizo-lopez-foods-inc-due-potential-risk>

Epidemiology

Listeria monocytogenes (*Listeria*) is estimated to cause 1,600 illnesses resulting in 1,500 hospitalizations and 260 related deaths.³ The CDC estimates *Listeria* is the third leading cause of death from foodborne illness in the United States at 15.9 deaths per 100,000 population, behind only *Vibrio vulnificus* (34.8 per 100,000 population), and *Clostridium botulinum* (17.3).⁴ Since 2012, a total of 38 cases of listeriosis have been reported among Nevada residents, of which 5 cases occurred among Washoe County residents.⁵⁻⁶

Prevention and Risk Factors

Types of food which are more often found to be contaminated with *Listeria* include unpasteurized soft cheeses, deli sliced cheeses, unheated deli meats,

cold cuts, and fermented or dry sausages, premade deli salads (coleslaw, potato, tuna, chicken), refrigerated pate and other meat spreads, refrigerated smoked fish, raw or lightly cooked sprouts, cut melon left out for more than 2 hours, cut melon left in refrigerator for more than a week, and raw/unpasteurized milk, yogurt and ice cream.⁷

Listeria is particularly harmful to certain high-risk groups, including:⁷

- Older adults (65+ years)
- People with weakened immune systems
- Pregnant people and newborns

Those who are pregnant are 10 times more likely to get *Listeria* compared to other people and can cause miscarriages, stillbirths, and preterm labor.⁸

If someone is considered among the high-risk groups it is important to prevent *Listeria* by:⁹

- Choosing safer food options, for a table of food alternatives:
<https://www.cdc.gov/listeria/prevention.html>
- Checking for recalled foods contaminated with *Listeria*: <https://www.foodsafety.gov/recalls-and-outbreaks>
- If pregnant and feeling more tired and achy than normal, or experiencing headache, stiff neck, confusion, loss of balance, or seizures – **see your healthcare provider right away.**¹⁰

Signs & Symptoms

If *Listeria* are ingested, a person may become ill with intestinal listeriosis illness within 24 hours experiencing diarrhea and vomiting, which usually lasts 1-3 days. Listeriosis may develop into an invasive form of illness within 2 weeks of eating contaminated food and symptoms could worsen and include fever, muscle aches, and fatigue. For those who are not pregnant invasive listeriosis symptoms

may also include headache, stiff neck, confusion, loss of balance, and seizures.¹¹

Diagnosis & Testing

Persons experiencing symptoms consistent with *Listeria* should seek an evaluation from a medical provider. *Listeria monocytogenes* can be isolated in standard bacterial culture of normally sterile body sites including CSF and serum. Culture is preferred in order to subtype, however culture-independent diagnostic tests can be used as well.¹²

Treatment

Persons with intestinal listeriosis usually recover without the use of medication. Persons with invasive listeriosis should be treated with antibiotics, including IV ampicillin and gentamicin for 14 to 21 days, as long as there are no contraindications.¹²

Reporting

The list of reportable communicable diseases and reporting forms can be found at:

<http://tinyurl.com/WashoeDiseaseReporting>

Report communicable diseases to Northern Nevada Public Health. To report a communicable disease, please call 775-328-2447 or fax your report to the NNPH at 775-328-3764.

Acknowledgement

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