

Outbreak of *Listeria* Infections Linked to Deli Meats

Final Update



Investigation Notice

Posted January 28, 2021 at 4:00 PM ET

This outbreak is over. Even when there are no ongoing outbreaks, people who are at higher risk for getting sick with *Listeria* should avoid eating deli meats, unless heated to an internal temperature of 165°F or until steaming hot.

CDC, public health and regulatory officials in several states, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Food Safety and Inspection Service (USDA-FSIS) investigated a multistate outbreak of *Listeria monocytogenes* infections linked to deli meats.

Final Outbreak Information

At A Glance

- [Reported Cases](#): 12
 - [States](#): 4
 - Hospitalizations: 12
 - Deaths: 1
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- 12 people infected with the outbreak strain of *Listeria* were reported from Florida, Louisiana, Massachusetts, and New York.
 - All 12 people were hospitalized. One death was reported from Florida.
 - [Epidemiologic evidence](#) showed that deli meat was the likely source of this outbreak.
 - In interviews with 11 ill people, all reported eating Italian-style meats, such as salami, mortadella, and prosciutto. They reported purchasing prepackaged deli meats and meats sliced at deli counters at various locations.
 - A specific type of deli meat or a common supplier was not identified.

- Deli meats, also called lunch meat or cold cuts, can have *Listeria* bacteria. Always follow food safety steps to [prevent getting sick from *Listeria* in deli meats](#), even when there are no ongoing outbreaks.

Advice to People at Higher Risk for *Listeria* Infection

You are at [higher risk for getting sick with *Listeria*](#) if you are pregnant, aged 65 or older, or have a weakened immune system due to medical conditions such as cancer, diabetes, liver or kidney disease, alcoholism, or HIV. Treatments that make it more difficult for the body to fight off illness, such as steroids and chemotherapy, also can increase the chance of *Listeria* infection. If you are not in these groups, you are unlikely to get sick from *Listeria*.

Even when there are no ongoing outbreaks:

- **Avoid eating deli meats, unless heated to an internal temperature of 165°F or until steaming hot just before serving.**

Advice to Everyone

Always follow these food safety steps when handling deli meats:

- **Clean**
 - Wash your hands after handling deli meats.
 - Clean [refrigerator shelves](#), kitchen countertops, utensils, and other surfaces that may have come into contact with deli meats. *Listeria* can survive in refrigerated temperatures and can easily spread to other foods and surfaces.
- **Separate**
 - Don't let juice from deli meats get on other foods, utensils, or food preparation surfaces.
- **Chill**
 - Keep factory-sealed, unopened packages of deli meats in the refrigerator for no longer than 2 weeks.
 - Keep opened packages and meat sliced at a local deli in the refrigerator for no longer than 3 to 5 days.

Advice to Retailers

Follow USDA best practices for controlling *Listeria* contamination in deli areas.

Symptoms of *Listeria* Infection

- Listeriosis can cause different symptoms, depending on the person and the part of the body affected.
 - **Pregnant people** typically experience only fever and other flu-like symptoms, such as fatigue and muscle aches. However, infections during pregnancy can lead to miscarriage, stillbirth, premature delivery, or life-threatening infection of the newborn.
 - **People who are not pregnant** may experience symptoms that include headache, stiff neck, confusion, loss of balance, and convulsions in addition to fever and muscle aches.
- People with invasive listeriosis usually report symptoms starting 1 to 4 weeks after eating food contaminated with *Listeria*; some people have reported symptoms starting as late as 70 days after exposure or as early as the same day of exposure.

Investigation Details

January 28, 2021

CDC, public health and regulatory officials in several states, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Food Safety and Inspection Service (USDA-FSIS) investigated a multistate outbreak of *Listeria monocytogenes* infections.

Public health investigators used the [PulseNet](#) system to identify illnesses that were part of this outbreak. PulseNet is the national subtyping network of public health and food regulatory agency laboratories coordinated by CDC. DNA fingerprinting was performed on *Listeria* bacteria isolated from ill people by using a standardized laboratory and data analysis method called [whole genome sequencing](#) (WGS). CDC PulseNet manages a national database of these sequences that are used to identify possible outbreaks. WGS gives investigators detailed information about the bacteria causing illness. In this investigation, WGS showed that bacteria isolated from ill people were closely related genetically. This means that people in this outbreak were more likely to share a common source of infection.

As of January 26, 2021, a total of 12 people infected with the outbreak strain of *Listeria monocytogenes* were reported from four states.

Listeria samples from ill people were collected from [August 6, 2020, to October 30, 2020](#). Ill people ranged in age from 40 to 89 years, with a median age of 81 years, and 83% were female. All 12 people were hospitalized, and one death was reported from Florida.

Investigation of the Outbreak

[Epidemiologic evidence](#) showed that deli meat was the likely source of this outbreak.

State and local public health officials interviewed ill people about the foods they ate in the month before they became ill. Of the 11 people interviewed, all reported eating Italian-style deli meats, such as salami, mortadella, and prosciutto. They reported purchasing prepackaged deli meats and meats sliced at deli counters at various locations.

USDA-FSIS and state officials reviewed records collected from stores where ill people purchased deli meats to find a common supplier of deli meats. They also tested deli meat products that ill people reported eating. However, they did not find a common supplier or a specific type of deli meat as the source of this outbreak.

As of January 28, 2021, this outbreak is over.