

Listeria Outbreak Linked to Deli Meat and Cheese



Investigation Notice

Posted November 9, 2022

You are at higher risk for severe *Listeria* illness if you are pregnant, aged 65 or older, or have a weakened immune system due to certain medical conditions or treatments. If you are in any of these groups, do not eat meat or cheese from any deli counter, unless it is reheated to an internal temperature of 165°F or until steaming hot.

Fast Facts

- Illnesses: 16
- Hospitalizations: 13
- Deaths: 1
- [States](#): 6
- Recall: No
- Investigation status: Active



Listeria in Deli Meat and Cheese

Deli meats (cold cuts, lunch meats, hot dogs, and pâtés sold at the deli) and cheeses are known sources of *Listeria* illnesses. This is because *Listeria* can easily spread among food on deli countertops, deli slicers, surfaces, and hands. *Listeria*

is a hardy germ that can be difficult to fully remove once it is in the deli. It can survive and grow at cold temperatures in the refrigerator.

Source of the Outbreak

Information collected so far shows that deli meat and cheese purchased at deli counters in multiple states are the likely sources of this outbreak.

It is difficult for investigators to identify a single food as the source of outbreaks linked to deli meats and cheeses. This is because *Listeria* spreads easily between food and the deli environment and can persist for a long time in deli display cases and on equipment. A contaminated food likely introduced the outbreak strain of *Listeria* into delis in multiple states. Investigators are working to identify any specific products or delis that may be contaminated with the outbreak strain.

What People at High Risk Should Do

You are at [higher risk for severe *Listeria* illness](#) if you are pregnant, aged 65 or older, or have a weakened immune system due to certain medical conditions or treatments. If you are not in these groups, you are unlikely to get very sick from *Listeria*. If you are at higher risk:

- **Do not eat meat or cheese from any deli counter**, unless it is reheated to an internal temperature of 165°F or until steaming hot.
 - This is because *Listeria* can grow on foods kept in the refrigerator, but it is easily killed by heating food to a high enough temperature.
- **[Clean](#) your refrigerator, containers, and surfaces** that may have touched deli meat or cheese from the deli.
- **Call your healthcare provider right away** if you have any symptoms of severe *Listeria* illness after eating meat or cheese from a deli:
 - **People who are not pregnant** may experience headache, stiff neck, confusion, loss of balance, and convulsions, in addition to fever and muscle aches.
 - **Pregnant people** usually experience only fever, fatigue, and muscle aches. However, *Listeria* can cause pregnancy loss or premature birth. It can also cause serious illness or death in newborns.

What Businesses Should Do

- Follow [USDA-FSIS best practices](#) for controlling *Listeria* contamination in deli areas.

About *Listeria*

- *Listeria* can cause severe illness (known as invasive listeriosis) when the bacteria spread beyond the gut to other parts of the body.
 - Almost all severe illnesses from *Listeria* result in hospitalizations and sometimes death.
- Symptoms of severe illness usually start within 2 weeks after eating food contaminated with *Listeria*, but may start as early as the same day or as late as 10 weeks after.
 - **People who are not pregnant** may experience headache, stiff neck, confusion, loss of balance, and convulsions, in addition to fever and muscle aches.
 - **Pregnant people** usually experience only fever, fatigue, and muscle aches. However, *Listeria* can cause pregnancy loss or premature birth. It can also cause serious illness or death in newborns.
- Pregnant people and their newborns, adults 65 years or older, and people with weakened immune systems are at higher risk for severe illness.
 - Other people can be infected with *Listeria*, but they usually get mild food poisoning symptoms, like diarrhea and fever, and usually recover without treatment.

Investigation Details

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CDC, public health and regulatory officials in several states, the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Food Safety and Inspection Service (USDA-FSIS), and the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) are collecting [different types of data](#) to investigate a multistate outbreak of *Listeria monocytogenes* infections.

Epidemiologic and laboratory data show that meat and cheese from deli counters contaminated with *Listeria* are making people sick. Investigators are still working to identify any specific products or delis that may be contaminated with the outbreak strain.

Epidemiologic Data

As of November 9, 2022, 16 people infected with the outbreak strain of *Listeria* have been reported from 6 states. Sick people's samples were collected from April 17, 2021, to September 29, 2022. The true number of sick people in this outbreak is likely higher than the number reported, and the outbreak may not be limited to the states with known illnesses. This is because some people recover without medical care and are not tested for *Listeria*. In addition, recent illnesses may not yet be reported as it usually takes [3 to 4 weeks](#) to determine if a sick person is part of an outbreak.

Public health officials collect information about the age, ethnicity, and other demographics of sick people, and the types of foods they have eaten, to provide clues that can help identify the source of the outbreak. Sick people range in age from 38 to 92 years, with a median age of 74, and 62% are male. Of 13 people with ethnicity information available, 11 are of Eastern European background or speak Russian. Of 14 people with information available, 13 have been hospitalized. One person got sick during their pregnancy, resulting in pregnancy loss. Additionally, one death has been reported from Maryland.

State and local public health officials are interviewing people about the foods they ate in the month before they got sick. Of the 12 people interviewed, 11 reported eating meat or cheese from deli counters. Among seven sick people in New York, five bought sliced deli meat or cheese from at least one location of NetCost Market, a grocery store chain that sells international foods. Sick people from other states purchased deli meats or cheeses from other delis.

Investigators do not believe that NetCost Market delis are the only source of illnesses because some sick people in the outbreak did not shop at a NetCost Market. A contaminated food likely introduced the outbreak strain of *Listeria* into delis in multiple states.

Laboratory Data

Public health investigators are using the [PulseNet](#) system to identify illnesses that may be part of this outbreak. CDC PulseNet manages a national database of DNA fingerprints of bacteria that cause foodborne illnesses. DNA fingerprinting is performed on bacteria using a method called [whole genome sequencing \(WGS\)](#).

WGS showed that bacteria from sick people's samples are closely related genetically. This suggests that people in this outbreak got sick from the same food.

In 2021, health officials in New York state and New York City found the outbreak strain of *Listeria* in several environmental and food samples:

- Environmental samples from a NetCost Market deli in Brooklyn
- Several open packages of mortadella and ham that were sliced at the same NetCost Market deli in Brooklyn
- Sliced salami that a sick person bought from a NetCost Market deli in Staten Island

NetCost Market voluntarily closed the deli temporarily in Brooklyn after [New York officials](#) notified them about the sampling results. NetCost Market performed a deep cleaning and then reopened the deli in Brooklyn after further environmental testing did not identify *Listeria*.

In September 2022, the outbreak strain was found at the same Brooklyn NetCost Market deli; however, the most recent illness with NetCost Market exposure was in October 2021. After a deep cleaning, additional environmental testing did not identify *Listeria* in the deli.

Public Health Actions

CDC advises people at [higher risk of severe *Listeria* illness](#) to not eat meat or cheese from any deli counter, unless it is reheated to an internal temperature of 165°F or until steaming hot.