

Listeria Outbreak Linked to Meats Sliced at Delis



Investigation Notice

Posted July 19, 2024

Listeria is especially harmful to people who are pregnant, aged 65 or older, or with weakened immune systems. CDC always recommends people at higher risk for listeriosis avoid eating meats sliced at the deli or heat them to an internal temperature of 165°F or until steaming hot before eating.

Fast Facts

- Illnesses: 28
- Hospitalizations: 28
- Deaths: 2
- [States](#): 12
- Recall: No
- Investigation status: Active

Source of the Outbreak

Many people in this outbreak are reporting eating meats that they had sliced at deli counters. Investigators are [collecting information](#) to determine the specific products that may be contaminated. Products sold at the deli, especially those sliced or prepared at the deli, can be contaminated with *Listeria*. *Listeria* spreads easily among deli equipment, surfaces, hands and food. Refrigeration does not kill *Listeria*, but reheating to a high enough temperature before eating will kill any germs that may be on these meats.

What People at Higher Risk Should Do

Listeria is especially harmful if you are pregnant, are aged 65 or older, or have a weakened immune system due to certain medical conditions or treatments. Other people can be infected with *Listeria*, but they rarely become seriously ill.

If you are pregnant, are aged 65 or older, or have a weakened immune system:

- **[Do not eat](#) meats you get sliced at any deli counter, unless it is reheated to an internal temperature of 165°F or until steaming hot.** Let it cool before you eat it.
 - *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 sliced deli meats.**
- **Call your healthcare provider right away if you have any of these symptoms:**
 - **People who are not pregnant** usually have fever, muscle aches, and tiredness. They may also get a headache, stiff neck, confusion, loss of balance, or seizures.
 - **Pregnant people** usually have fever, muscle aches, and tiredness. However, *Listeria* can cause pregnancy loss or premature birth. It can also cause serious illness or death in newborns.
- **Provide information to [help us identify the specific deli products](#)**
 - If you are sick with *Listeria*, local or state health officials may contact you to find out what you ate in the month before you got sick. They may also ask for copies of receipts, your shopper card number, or leftover food for testing.

What Businesses Should Do

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

Listeria Symptoms

- *Listeria* is especially harmful to people who are pregnant, aged 65 or older, or have weakened immune systems. This is because *Listeria* is more likely to spread beyond their gut to other parts of their body, resulting in a severe condition known as invasive listeriosis.
 - **For people who are pregnant**, *Listeria* can cause pregnancy loss, premature birth, or a life-threatening infection in their newborn.

- **For people who are 65 years or older or who have a weakened immune system**, *Listeria* often results in hospitalization and sometimes death.
- Symptoms 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.
 - **Pregnant people** usually have fever, muscle aches, and tiredness.
 - **People who are not pregnant** usually have fever, muscle aches, and tiredness. They may also get a headache, stiff neck, confusion, loss of balance, or seizures.

Investigation Details

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

Epidemiologic information shows that many people in this outbreak report eating meats sliced at deli counters. We do not have information to show that people are getting sick from prepackaged deli meats.

Epidemiologic Data

As of July 19, 2024, a total of 28 people infected with the outbreak strain of *Listeria* have been reported from 12 states (see [map](#)). Sick people's samples were collected from May 29, 2024, to July 5, 2024 (see [timeline](#)). Of 28 people with information available, all have been hospitalized. One person got sick during their pregnancy and remained pregnant after recovering. Two deaths have been reported, 1 in Illinois and 1 in New Jersey.

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 many different types of information from sick people, including their age, race, ethnicity, other demographics, and the foods they ate in the month before they got sick. This information provides clues to help investigators identify the source of the outbreak.

The table below has information about sick people in this outbreak (“n” is the number of people with information available for each demographic).

Table of demographic information (n is the number of people with information available)

Demographics	Information
Age (n=27)	Range from 32 to 94 years Median age of 75
Sex (n=28)	46% female 54% male
Race (n=22)	72% White 23% African American/Black 5% Asian
Ethnicity (n=22)	96% non-Hispanic 4% Hispanic

State and local public health officials are interviewing people about the foods they ate in the month before they got sick. People are reporting eating a variety of meats sliced at deli counters. Of the 18 people able to be interviewed, 16 (89%) reported eating meats sliced at a deli, most commonly deli-sliced turkey, liverwurst, and ham. Meats were sliced at a variety of supermarket and grocery store delis.

CDC conducted an analysis comparing foods reported by people in this outbreak to foods reported by people who got sick with *Listeria* but were not part of an outbreak. The analysis showed that people in this outbreak were more likely to eat deli-sliced turkey and liverwurst. This information suggests that meats sliced at the deli are a likely source of this outbreak. However, at this time CDC doesn’t have enough information to say which deli meats are the source of this outbreak.

Laboratory and Traceback 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 may have gotten sick from eating this food.

USDA-FSIS is working to identify the suppliers of deli meats, sliced at deli counters, purchased by people in this outbreak.

Public Health Actions

CDC advises people who are pregnant, aged 65 or older, or have a weakened immune system to contact their healthcare provider if they have any [Listeria symptoms](#). Additionally, CDC advises people to [take steps](#) to protect themselves from getting *Listeria* from deli meats by avoiding eating meats sliced at the deli unless they are heated before eating.