

# Listeria...The facts!

## What is Listeria?

Listeria is a group of bacteria that includes both foodborne pathogens and non-pathogens.

Listeria monocytogenes is the major human pathogen causing a variety of diseases ranging from mild and self-limiting to severe and life-threatening.

Listeria is a gram-positive rod shaped bacteria and a facultative anaerobe (grows best in low oxygen environments).

Listeria is widespread throughout the environment and can be found in soil, wood, decaying vegetation and water.

Listeriosis is an infection that usually develops after eating food contaminated by Listeria bacteria.



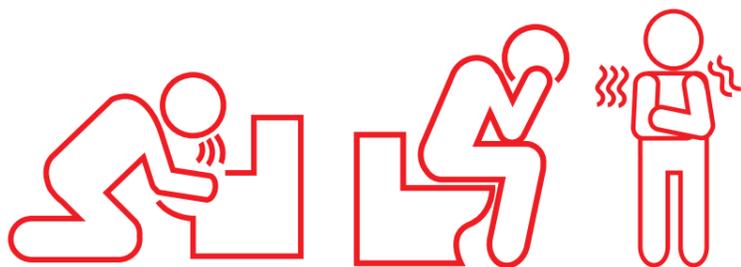
## Why is Listeria so important to control within the food industry?

Listeria is versatile and uses different nutrients and will survive in low nutrient, low moisture and low oxygen conditions to persist and colonise a food manufacturing environment.

The optimum growth temperature for Listeria is 37 °C, however it can continue to grow at low temperatures unlike other food pathogens e.g. E coli, Salmonella and Campylobacter which have limited growth below 10 °C. Therefore, Listeria is able to continue growing slowly at refrigeration temperatures and has been shown to be able to grow down to -0.4 °C in foods that do not freeze at this temperature and survive, but not grow in freezing conditions, so will be applicable to the frozen food industry also.

## What is Listeriosis?

Listeriosis is a serious bacterial infection caused by Listeria monocytogenes and can affect people of all ages, but it is most common in pregnant women, new-borns, the elderly and people with weakened immune systems. Symptoms may include fever, muscle aches, nausea and diarrhoea. In severe cases Listeria monocytogenes can cause meningitis, sepsis or even death. For expectant mothers there is the potential for abortion or still births.



Vomiting

Diarrhoea

Fever

## Which foods are associated with outbreaks of Listeriosis?

**Fish** - Cold smoked fish, cooked shellfish, pate

**Meat** - Cooked meats/poultry, pate, cured meats

**Pasteurised/unpasteurised cheeses** - Soft blue veined cheeses, mould-ripened soft cheeses

**Ready to eat** - Pre-packed sandwiches, prepared salads, some cut fruits, including melon



## Who's at risk from severe Listeriosis?

People over 60 years of age  
Pregnant women and their unborn babies  
Babies less than one month old  
People with a weakened immune system

## Number of cases of Listeriosis in EU in 2021

- 2268 cases
- 38 hospitalised
- 9 deaths

### Source of Information

European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control annual epidemiological report for 2021