

## Education is Key in preventing Listeria Outbreaks

*Listeria* has been a major concern, not just in North America but in Europe and other countries in the world also.

The disease seems to be predominantly affecting the elderly group. A certain strain of *Listeria monocytogenes* likely is adjusting to specific conditions of a specific group. However, other susceptible individuals with low immune system may also be affected.

In the last years listeriosis disease, cases increased more than any other food pathogens. There are numbers of factors that may contribute to its spread. It can be present anywhere, making it easy for cross-contamination to occur. In addition, it can survive at wide ranges of temperatures and climate changes. *Listeria monocytogenes* can also multiply at refrigerator temperature.

The most concerning of foodborne listeriosis is the cross-contamination of ready to eat products such as seafood, meats, and poultry. One of the most important factors in the wide range of foods in Ready-to-Eat categories is the awareness of *Listeria* behavior and food handling. RTE foods may have low numbers of *Listeria mono* and likely represents a low risk of infection as long as the temperature and storage time are appropriate prior to consumption. Food handling is a major source of cross-contamination. Hygiene, storage, level of salt, level of water activity in RTE foods are all part of food safety advice.

The good news is that these bacteria can be destroyed just by the pasteurization process; it does not survive at low pH and does not like competition of high numbers of different bacteria. Do not take chances. Keep ready to eat product away from non-cooked meats.

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