

PREVENTING LISTERIOSIS IN HOSPITALS AND NURSING/CARE HOMES

Listeriosis is a rare but potentially life-threatening illness caused by the bacterium *Listeria monocytogenes*. Those at increased risk include patients/residents who have weakened immunity due to illness, disease, medication/treatment, as well as pregnant women and people of advanced age with a weakened immune system. The illness has sometimes been linked to eating chilled ready-to-eat foods and controls are therefore needed to minimise the risk from this source. Although it is relatively rare, it can be serious for these most vulnerable groups, where around a third of infections result in death.

As a hospital, nursing, residential or care home, you are classed as a food business because you provide food on a regular basis to people in your care, and you are therefore **legally responsible** for ensuring that the food you supply to these people is safe.

Take these simple steps to reduce the risk of listeriosis to vulnerable people in your care:

Keep chilled ready-to-eat foods cold

- Keep chilled ready-to-eat foods **at or below 5°C** and ensure these foods are kept in the fridge until as close as possible to the time they are served to patients/residents and eaten immediately, or as soon as possible after serving*.
- Uneaten served food should be thrown away. Never allow chilled ready-to-eat foods to be stored in patients'/residents' bedside cabinets for consumption at a later time, as this will increase the risk of illness.
- Ensure fridges used for food storage are maintained at a temperature of **below 5°C**. Check fridge temperatures regularly using an accurate fridge thermometer and in accordance with in-house procedures (guidance on how to do this effectively can be obtained from your catering manager or your local Environmental Health Department). If necessary, adjust the setting to reduce the temperature and check to ensure the unit maintains the correct temperature.

Follow 'use by' dates

- Ensure chilled ready-to-eat foods with a 'use by' date are eaten by this date and never beyond it. Such foods, including pre-packed sandwiches, cooked sliced meats, smoked fish, salads and pre-cut fruit or vegetables, should be kept chilled at or below 5°C and consumed as soon as possible after production or receipt.
- Bulk pre-packed perishable foods, when opened, should be kept chilled at or below 5°C and used within two days, unless the manufacturer's instructions state otherwise.

Take extra care with certain foods and medically highly vulnerable groups

- Ensure patients/residents at increased risk of listeriosis avoid eating soft mould-ripened cheeses, soft blue-veined cheeses and all types of pâté.
- Advise visitors against bringing in chilled ready-to-eat foods for these most vulnerable groups, whether homemade or shop-bought.
- Obtain chilled ready-to-eat foods for patients only from reputable suppliers.

*It is advised that this time should be kept as short as possible for vulnerable groups (well under the 4 hours specified in the temperature control legislation)

For the latest information, advice and guidance see:

- <http://www.food.gov.uk/policy-advice/microbiology/listeria>
- <http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/Listeriosis/Pages/Introduction.aspx>

Further information:

- FSA Food hygiene: a guide for businesses:
<http://www.food.gov.uk/multimedia/pdfs/publication/hygienguidebooklet.pdf>
- FSA Safer food, better business supplement for care homes:
<http://www.food.gov.uk/business-industry/caterers/sfbb/carehomes/>
- HSC PHA Preventing food poisoning in hospital and at home:
<http://www.publichealth.hscni.net/publications/preventing-food-poisoning-home-and-healthcare-settings-0>