

INFORMATION SHEET

Listeriosis during Pregnancy

expert care for women

What is listeriosis?

Listeriosis is an infection caused by the bacteria *listeria monocytogenes*. The bacteria may be found in dust, soil, animal faeces, water and some foods. Listeriosis may occur if the bacteria are ingested; it is very rare and only occurs in less than 0.7 per 100,000 people. Infection cannot occur through contact with people who have listeriosis. During pregnancy, women are immunosuppressed and may be more susceptible to infections of all kinds.

What are the symptoms of listeriosis?

Often people with listeriosis show no symptoms. Mild effects of the infection are consistent with food poisoning or the common cold, including headaches, fever, aches, pains and nausea. Serious effects of the disease may include severe cramping, meningitis and septicaemia, also known as blood poisoning.

How can listeriosis affect my baby?

An unborn fetus may not be affected by listeriosis. In rare cases it may affect the health of the baby, approximately two until 14 days after the mother has been infected. In extreme cases, listeriosis may lead to spontaneous miscarriage, stillbirth, premature labour or an ill newborn.

How can I avoid listeriosis?

Listeriosis can be prevented by taking a few simple precautions including:

- hygienic food preparation;
- thoroughly washing your hands;
- eating well cooked food;
- ensuring leftover foods are appropriately stored;
- not eating food that is close to the recommended use by date, and
- avoiding food from salad bars.

What food should I avoid?

Avoiding foods that may cause food poisoning can help prevent listeriosis. Please remember that listeriosis is very rare. Some foods you may want to avoid include:

- dairy products made from unpasteurised milk eg raw goats milk;
- feta, soft, semi soft and surface ripened cheeses (pre-packaged and delicatessen) e.g. brie camembert, ricotta, and blue;
- salads and pre-cut cold meats that may not be fresh;
- pate;
- raw seafood including sashimi;
- smoked seafood including smoked oysters and mussels;
- cold cooked chicken, and
- soft serve ice cream.

Can listeriosis be treated?

Yes. People infected with listeriosis may be prescribed a course of antibiotics.