



# Why Worry About Listeria?

**None of us wants to get sick from the food we eat! The latest concern is listeria, linked to both contaminated cantaloupe and romaine lettuce. Here's how to keep you and your family safe.**

## What is listeria?

Listeria is an infection caused by bacteria. While outbreaks occasionally make the headlines, listeria exposure is pretty common. According to the [CDC](#), most healthy people spontaneously clear the infection in about a week. Yet the symptoms should not be taken lightly. Of the 1,600 reported US cases of listeria annually about 250 result in death.

**The single biggest sources** of listeria infections are foods that are **contaminated with animal feces or soil**. Many outbreaks have been tied to produce. But listeria can hide in many food sources, such as hot dogs and deli products, as well as unpasteurized milk and products such as cheeses made from raw milk.

## Is the outbreak contained in certain areas?

The CDC says the cantaloupe outbreak originated in [Colorado](#), the romaine lettuce came from [California](#), but outbreaks can happen anywhere and because of our food transportation system, outbreaks can occur in many locations. In 2010 a listeria outbreak occurred in [Texas](#), tied to locally processed celery.

## Who is at risk?

Anyone can be affected by consuming contaminated food that contains the listeria bacteria. However pregnant women, older individuals or anyone with a compromised immune system can be more severely impacted by listeria. Pregnant women need to take particular precautions because exposure to listeria can cause miscarriage, premature delivery, and fatal infections to the unborn fetus.

## What are the symptoms of listeria?

The first signs of listeria infection are intestinal discomfort and diarrhea. Listeria is often accompanied by flu-like symptoms (fever, muscle



aches and pain). Be aware of other potential symptoms, such as headaches, neck pain, loss of balance, confusion and even convulsions. If you think you have been exposed to listeria bacteria, go immediately to your doctor for a diagnosis and treatment. Listeria infections can be treated with antibiotics.

## What precautions should be taken?

**Know the source of your food** whenever possible for reporting purposes. Be diligent about washing and rinsing your produce before eating. Run it under cool water for at least 30 seconds, and dry it with a paper towel or clean kitchen towel.

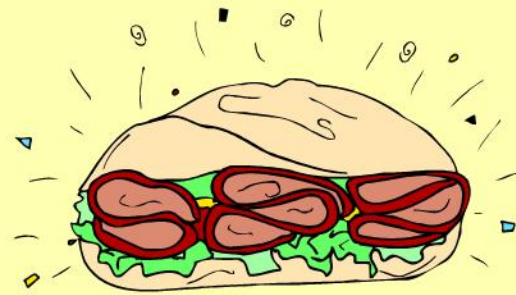
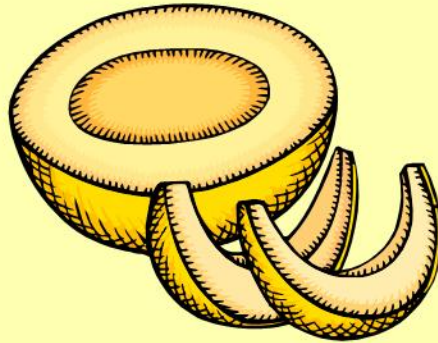
**Cook raw poultry and meats thoroughly.** The USDA suggests using a **food thermometer** to measure the internal temperature of your cooked meats. Avoid unpasteurized milk, or any dairy products such as cheeses that may contain raw milk. Check the temperature of your refrigerator, to make sure that it is cooling at or below 40°F. A refrigerator that is not cooling at the proper temperature can be a breeding ground for bacteria.

## Be smart, be safe! Avoid listeria hysteria!

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