



Preventing Listeriosis in Pregnant Hispanic Women in the U.S.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) is alerting pregnant women about the risks of listeriosis, a foodborne disease that can severely affect a pregnant woman and her unborn child.

Listeria can affect all races and ethnic groups, but **pregnant women** are 10 times more likely than other healthy adults to get listeriosis due to hormonal changes that affect the immune system during pregnancy. Pregnant Hispanic women are about 24 times more likely than the general population to get listeriosis. A pregnant mother may pass *Listeria* onto her unborn baby without even knowing it because she doesn't feel sick at all, yet **the disease can lead to miscarriage, stillbirth, premature labor, the delivery of a low birthweight infant, a wide range of health problems for a newborn, or even infant death.**

The FDA has developed a Community Educator's Guide in English and Spanish, which includes a variety of printable and customizable materials, to help educate communities on this serious foodborne risk.

Learn more and download the guide at:

<https://www.fda.gov/Food/FoodbornenessContaminants/PeopleAtRisk/ucm062993.htm>
<https://www.fda.gov/Food/ResourcesForYou/Consumers/ucm079667.htm>

What Is Listeriosis?

Listeriosis is a foodborne illness caused by eating food contaminated with *Listeria* bacteria, which are commonly found in soil, water, decaying vegetation, and the intestinal tract of animals such as milk cows. *Listeria* can also be found in soft cheeses or other products made from **unpasteurized milk** and processed foods that have become contaminated — such as deli meats. Unlike many other foodborne bacteria, *Listeria* grows at refrigerator temperatures. However, cooking and commercial processes like pasteurization destroy *Listeria*.

Pregnant Hispanic Women are at Greater Risk

Pregnant Hispanic women can be at particular risk for listeriosis because of certain cultural dietary choices. In many Latin American cultures, it is common to eat soft cheeses like Queso Fresco, which are often made from “raw” (unpasteurized) milk. Many women are simply unaware that **cheese made with unpasteurized milk can contain potentially deadly bacteria.**

In some Hispanic communities in the U.S., people have been known to purchase raw milk and use it to make cheese, and then sell it door-to-door. Unlicensed vendors also sell it from carts. This cheese can sometimes also be found in small neighborhood stores.



Symptom of Listeriosis

Listeriosis can cause fever, chills, muscle aches, nausea and diarrhea, or upset stomach. If infection spreads to the nervous system, it can lead to headaches, stiff neck, confusion, loss of balance, or convulsions. In extreme cases, death can occur.

Preventing Listeriosis in Pregnant Women

The FDA advises all pregnant women **not to eat soft cheeses** unless they are made with pasteurized milk and to follow these additional tips to avoid the illness:

Do NOT eat:

- Soft cheeses (such as Feta, Brie, Camembert, Blue-veined cheeses, Queso Blanco, Queso Fresco, Asadero, and Penela) – unless they're made with pasteurized milk
- Hot dogs and luncheon meats unless they're reheated until steaming
- Refrigerated pâtés or meat spreads
- Refrigerated smoked seafood-unless it's in a cooked dish, such as a casserole