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NF94-168 *Listeria monocytogenes*

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Listeria monocytogenes

By Susan S. Sumner, Extension Food Microbiologist
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- The Disease:** Listeriosis is a rare but potentially fatal disease. Symptoms in adults include the sudden onset of flulike symptoms such as fever, chills, headache, backache, and sometimes abdominal pain and diarrhea. Symptoms in newborns include respiratory distress, refusal to drink, and vomiting. Possible complications of listeriosis include meningitis or meningoencephalitis, which affects tissues around the brain or spine, and septicemia, which is blood poisoning. Listeriosis can cause spontaneous abortions and stillbirths.
- The Organism:** *Listeria* bacteria can grow slowly at refrigeration temperatures and can also grow in packages with little or no oxygen.
- Sources:** *Listeria monocytogenes* bacteria are found frequently in the environment. They are common in the intestines of humans and animals, milk, soil, leafy vegetables, and food processing environments.
- Control:** Avoid raw milk and cheese made from unpasteurized milk. Pregnant women and other high-risk groups are advised to follow "keep refrigerated" labels and carefully observe "sell by" and "use by" dates on processed products, and to thoroughly reheat frozen or refrigerated processed meat and poultry.
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File NF168 under FOOD AND NUTRITION
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