



- Please immediately bring to the attention of all doctors -

Date: 02 November 2007 Contact telephone number: **8226-7177 (24 hours/7 days)**

***Listeria* warning**

The Communicable Disease Control Branch (CDCB) has noticed a small increase in the number of notified cases of *Listeria monocytogenes* infection in the past month. Two deaths have occurred in immunocompromised patients. CDCB is currently conducting investigations to determine if there is any link between these cases.

Clinical Features

Listeria monocytogenes is widespread in nature. While exposure to *Listeria* is frequent, the elderly, immunosuppressed, pregnant women and subsequently their new born babies are more susceptible to serious infection. Symptoms may include gastroenteritis through septicaemia and meningitis, with sudden onset of fever, headache, backache, nausea, vomiting, neck stiffness and gradual onset of confusion with decreased alertness. Symptoms may be relatively mild in pregnant women, but the infection may result in a stillbirth or neonatal meningitis and septicaemia. Person-to-person spread does not otherwise occur. The incubation period varies from 3 to 70 days with an average of 3 weeks. Diagnosis is made by culture of cerebrospinal fluid or blood; faecal culture is not useful.

Prevention

Listeria is contracted through consumption of contaminated foods. Unlike other bacteria, *Listeria* can multiply in refrigerated foods if they have been contaminated. Pregnant women, the elderly and immune suppressed people should take special care to follow these guidelines:

- Do not eat unpasteurised dairy products
- Avoid all soft cheeses
- Raw vegetables should be thoroughly washed before eating
- Avoid raw and smoked seafood, pâté and other delicatessen ready-to-eat meats
- Ensure that meats are thoroughly cooked
- After handling uncooked foods, wash hands, knives and cutting boards with detergent and hot water
- Avoid the use of untreated manure on vegetable crops which will be eaten raw
- Avoid contact with sick or stillborn farm animals.

A recent Australian study has shown that the provision of advice on *Listeria* prevention appears to be insufficient during prenatal consultations early in pregnancy and needs to be improved. Medications that suppress gastric acid secretion can increase the risk of infection. Further information on *Listeria* is available from the CDCB website; <http://www.dh.sa.gov.au/pehs/Youve-got-what/ygw-listeriosis.pdf> and Food Standards Australia New Zealand website;

<http://www.foodstandards.gov.au/newsroom/factsheets/factsheets2005/Listeriacommonlyaske3115.cfm>

Please provide the advice in this Public Health alert to people you see who are pregnant, elderly or immune suppressed.

Listeria monocytogenes infection is a notifiable disease under the PEH Act 1987.

For further information please contact the Communicable Disease Control Branch on (08) 8226 7177.

Dr Ann Koehler - Director, Communicable Disease Control Branch

Information contained within this advice should be treated as confidential and is for the intended recipient only.

PUBLIC HEALTH ALERT