

Hot News

Rising in *Listeria monocytogenes* infection – any risk for persons living with HIV?

Infection by the bacterium *Listeria monocytogenes* can produce gastrointestinal symptoms or severe systemic clinical forms, with sepsis, abscesses, meningitis, etc. Although it is a rare disease, it is on the rise in Europe and North America. It is a mandatory notifiable disease. The bacteria can contaminate foods such as unpasteurized dairy products, uncooked sausages, and raw seafood. Listeriosis is especially dangerous in pregnant women, newborns, and immunocompromised patients.

Listeriosis in Spain

From January 2000 to the end of 2021, a total of 8152 patients with listeriosis were hospitalized in Spain (Vázquez *et al.* *Int J Infect Dis* 2024). About half were immunocompromised. The average age of hospitalized individuals with listeriosis was 60 years. The rate of admission for listeriosis increased from 5/million in 2000 to 9/million in 2021. Mortality in hospitalized patients with listeriosis was high (17%) and more pronounced in the elderly.

An outbreak in Andalusia due to contaminated stuffed pork meat produced a peak in 2019, with 207 confirmed cases, four deaths and six abortions (Fernández-Martínez *et al.* *Euro Surveill* 2022). On the contrary, the COVID-19 pandemic and confinement caused a drop in listeriosis in 2020.

Listeriosis in pregnant women

Pregnant women have a higher risk of developing clinical manifestations after *Listeria* infection. Among the most frequent and serious complications are fetal death and neurological damage.

Hospitalizations for listeriosis in pregnant women in Spain since 2000 have increased significantly. A total of 540 cases were recorded (Vázquez *et al.* *J Infect Public Health* 2025), causing 146 cases of spontaneous abortions, and fetal or neonatal death. Other infants survived despite being premature and/or suffering neonatal complications.

Listeriosis in immunocompromised patients

Listeriosis has a worse prognosis in immunosuppressed patients. Overall, 48% of hospitalizations for listeriosis in Spain since 2000 occurred in patients with some immunosuppression (Vázquez *et al.* *Pathog Glob Health* 2025). The most frequent diseases associated with immunodeficiency were diabetes (40%), chronic renal failure (and dialysis) (20%), lymphomas/leukemias (19%), cirrhosis (12%), primary immunodeficiencies (3%), transplants (3%), and autoimmune diseases. The proportion of immunocompromised people with listeriosis has increased over the past two decades. Its mortality is 2-fold that observed in non-immunosuppressed patients with listeriosis.

Patients with HIV infection and listeriosis are uncommon. A total of 55 were identified during the study period, that is, 1.3% of those with immunosuppression. They had differential characteristics compared to the rest of immunosuppressed patients with listeriosis, as they were younger (mean age 50 years), more frequently male (65%) and their mortality was lower (9.8%). Sepsis and meningoencephalitis were the most frequent clinical complications.

Prevention of listeriosis

Clinical suspicion should be increased for listeriosis, to allow earlier diagnosis and proper management and treatment. Actions to improve food hygiene and safety,

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which reduce the risk of contamination, should be prioritized (*Herrador et al. Euro Surveill 2019*). Listeria grows at low temperatures (4°C) and is destroyed above 74°C. Therefore, it is advisable to avoid unpasteurized dairy products (fresh cheese, etc.); heating meats and sausages before eating; wash fruits and vegetables thoroughly; and consume well-cooked fish and seafood.

Epidemiological surveillance is essential to identify epidemic outbreaks quickly, which allow the source of contagion to be identified and the episode to end (*Mar-*

shall et al. 1999. MMWR 2020). Finally, it is advisable to strengthen health education, especially in the most susceptible populations, such as the immunosuppressed and pregnant women. Our findings suggest that HIV is not a particularly susceptible group for listeriosis.

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