



LISTERIOSIS (Veterinary) FACT SHEET

What is Listeriosis?

Listeriosis is a serious infection caused by the *Listeria monocytogenes* bacterium. It occurs worldwide, but is commonly diagnosed in urban areas of developed countries. This disease has a high death rate among newborns, pregnant women, the elderly and individuals with compromised immune systems. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, approximately 1,600 cases and 260 deaths occur annually in the United States.

What are the signs of listeriosis in animals?

Listeriosis is most common in ruminants (sheep, goats and cattle), but cases have occurred in dogs, cats, rabbits, guinea pigs, pigs, poultry, canaries, parrots and other species. A wide variety of mammals can carry the bacteria without becoming ill. The incubation period for ruminants varies from one day to three weeks and causes brain inflammation, blood infection or abortion. Signs of listeriosis in animals include loss of appetite, fever, depression, lack of coordination, salivation, circling and facial paralysis. Mastitis in cattle can also be seen. The disease is more common in animals one to three years old.

How does the disease affect people?

People begin showing symptoms within 3 to 70 days after exposure, with an average of 3 weeks. In healthy people, gastrointestinal upset can occur 1-2 days after exposure. Gastrointestinal upset can include nausea, vomiting, abdominal pain and diarrhea. Most healthy people do not develop symptoms. Some people may experience a rash or pustules on the skin after handling infected newborns and animals. Listeriosis primarily affects pregnant women, newborns, the elderly and people with weakened immune systems. Pregnant women may experience mild “flu-like symptoms” such as fever, chills, dizziness, headache, and gastrointestinal signs or may be asymptomatic. These signs can be followed by abortion, stillbirth, premature birth or a blood infection in the newborn. Newborns infected during pregnancy can develop serious complications. The elderly or immunocompromised person may experience brain inflammation, a blood infection or central nervous system infection.

How can my pets get the infection?

Ruminants (sheep, goats and cattle) usually get sick from eating contaminated food or drinking contaminated water. The bacteria are widespread and can live in soil, plants, mud and streams.

How can I get the infection?

Humans can become infected by eating the food (meats or unpasteurized dairy products) contaminated with the bacteria, inhaling the bacteria or by direct contact with the bacteria. Women can become infected during pregnancy and show no signs during pregnancy, but the baby can die or have serious complications. Immunocompromised individuals, pregnant women and the elderly are at a greater risk for listeriosis. People such as veterinarians or animal shelter workers can get the skin infection form of listeriosis.

How can I prevent infection?

To decrease the risk of listeriosis:

- Thoroughly cook all food, especially meat.
- Do not eat or drink unpasteurized dairy or milk.
- Thoroughly wash all fruits and vegetables.
- Separate uncooked meats from produce, cooked and ready-to-eat foods. Thoroughly wash utensils and hands after handling potentially contaminated foods.
- Pregnant women and those with weak immune systems should not eat soft style cheeses or deli meats, as contamination may occur after cooking and before packaging.
- Wash hands thoroughly after contact with animals.
- When assisting animals during birthing, wear gloves and wash hands afterwards.

Where can I get more information on listeriosis?

www.cdc.gov

Source of Information

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

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