

Listeriosis

Definition:

Listeriosis, a serious invasive infection, is caused by the bacteria *Listeria monocytogenes*. The disease primarily affects older adults, pregnant women, newborns, and adults with weakened immune systems.

Signs and symptoms:

Symptoms of listeriosis in non-pregnant individuals include fever, muscle aches, headache, stiff neck, confusion, loss of balance and convulsions, sometimes preceded by diarrhea or other gastrointestinal symptoms. Almost all cases have an invasive infection, where the bacteria spread beyond the gastrointestinal tract. Older adults typically present with septicemia and/or meningitis. Pregnant women typically experience fever and other non-specific symptoms, such as fatigue and aches. Infection during pregnancy can lead to miscarriage, stillbirth, premature deliver, or life-threatening infection of the newborn.

Transmission:

Eating contaminated food is the most likely transmission of listeriosis. *Listeria monocytogenes* is commonly found in soil and water. Animals can carry the bacterium without appearing ill and can contaminate foods of animal origin.

Diagnosis:

Listeriosis is diagnosed by clinical symptoms and laboratory tests. Laboratory tests include testing of stool, blood, or other sterile body fluid for the presence of *Listeria monocytogenes*.

Role of the School Nurse:

Prevention

- Provide education to students and staff regarding good hand washing with soap and water
- Promote proper hand washing after using the toilet, changing diapers or assisting children with the toilet or preparing/touching food
- Provide education on good food safety practices
- Pregnant women and persons with weakened immune systems have more specific food items to avoid – please see <http://www.cdc.gov/listeria/prevention.html>

Treatment Recommendations

- If symptoms are noted, the child should be referred to their primary care provider for treatment
- Listeriosis is treated with antibiotics

Exclusions

- Students should be excluded from school while symptomatic with diarrhea

Reporting Requirements

- Listeriosis is a reportable disease – report to Maine CDC at 1-800-821-5821

Resources:

- Maine CDC website (including fact sheet) <http://www.maine.gov/dhhs/mecdc/infectious-disease/epi/disease/listeriosis.shtml>
- Federal CDC website <http://www.cdc.gov/listeria>