



Deadly Listeria

Since 2000 there has been an alarming rise of listeria food poisoning, especially among vulnerable people over 60. The number of infected people has doubled, with the majority hospitalised and one third dying. This makes listeria, although still comparatively rare, the main cause of food poisoning deaths in England and Wales.

In response to this worrying rise the Food Standards Agency with local authorities such as Eastbourne are targeting the over 60s with appropriate food hygiene advice

What are listeria?

They are hardy bacteria widespread in the environment and gut of animals and therefore found in a variety of raw foods. Eating contaminated food can result in nausea, flu-like symptoms, fever, blood poisoning or meningitis. They can multiply, unusually, at fridge temperatures but are killed during cooking.

Those most at risk include pregnant women, the elderly and those with a weakened immune system such as cancer and organ transplant patients, but it is the steep increase in the over 60s causing most concern at present. **The types of food most contaminated** include meat and vegetable pates, soft ripened cheeses such as camembert and brie and, increasingly, prepacked sandwiches, cooked sliced meats and ready to eat prepacked cooked and chilled meals, which are very popular with the elderly.

Contaminated food looks and tastes normal so it is hard to tell if listeria is present. It is very important therefore that people take the following practical steps to avoid becoming ill:

- Keep your fridge at or below 5°C to slow down listeria's growth. Putting a thermometer inside will help you monitor the temperature. If fridges cannot maintain the right temperature you should adjust the setting or replace them.
- Follow the storage instructions on the label, especially for high risk food mentioned above
- Check the 'use by' date on food packaging and ensure you use the food before it expires. If the date is passed throw the food away. Better to stay safe than risk being very ill.
- Wash salads and fruit before eating
- When reheating food follow the manufacturer's instructions and ensure it is piping hot in the centre
- Eat cooked food, whether bought or delivered, as soon as possible. Do not leave it at room temperature for more than half an hour. If you do not want to eat it straight away put it in the fridge till you are ready and do not keep it for more than 2 days



If you would like more information please contact the food safety team in Environmental Health on **01323 415939** or visit our website on: **www.eastbourne.gov.uk/health/food**

