

Important Health Notice

March 16, 2010

Information for Healthcare Professionals

Volume 7, Issue 1

Page 1 of 2

LISTERIOSIS

This Important Health Notice (IHN) is based on information received to date and provides the following:

- Food recall information
- Awareness of listeriosis

The Chief Medical Officer of Health is warning the public not to consume certain Siena Foods Ltd. meat products, which may be contaminated with *Listeria monocytogenes*.

A list of affected products is available through the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) at:
<http://www.inspection.gc.ca/english/toce.shtml>

You can sign up for automatic recall notifications from CFIA to be alerted to potential illnesses at:
http://www.inspection.gc.ca/english/util/listserv/listsube.shtml?foodrecalls_rappelsaliments

Listeria monocytogenes is widespread in nature, being found commonly in soil, decaying vegetation, and water and as part of the fecal flora of many mammals. Since 1983, a number of food vehicles have been linked to listeriosis cases, including soft cheeses, deli-meats, butter, ready-to-eat pork products, cold-smoked trout and hot dogs. Ingestion of a suspect food does not necessarily result in infection with *Listeria*.

In Ontario, there are a higher number of listeriosis cases so far this year with 14 having been reported since December 23rd, 2009. These 14 cases include 5 deaths. However, none of the deaths have been linked either by food history or by laboratory genetic fingerprint (PFGE) to Siena products at this time. Ontario has an average of 40 cases and 8 deaths per year.

Highlights:

- There have been a greater than expected number of cases of listeriosis reported in Ontario.
- On March 11 and 12, 2010 the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) issued alerts warning the public not to consume certain Siena products that may be contaminated with *Listeria monocytogenes*.
- The CFIA is monitoring effectiveness of the recall and has requested the assistance of health units.
- Health care professionals are asked to be aware of *Listeria* as a potential cause of invasive illness.

To date, 2 of the 14 cases have been linked to the recalled Siena products. Both individuals were hospitalized but have since been discharged and are recovering. Both individuals reported eating food products from the company.

The CFIA advised that the recalled products were not shipped to high-risk institutions such as long-term care homes.

As a precaution, the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care has asked local public health unit staff to:

- 1) contact or conduct spot checks of long-term care homes, daycares and other high risk facilities that may have the products available;
- 2) look for affected products (that might be for sale) during the course of routine inspections of food premises by health inspectors

Information for Clinicians

The mean incubation period of listeriosis is not well established. It likely varies depending on the concentration of *Listeria* in the food. In one of the largest outbreaks of *Listeria* recorded, the median incubation period was 31 days (range 11 to 70 days). In other *Listeria* outbreaks the incubation period has ranged from 3 to 70 days.

Infection with *Listeria* usually manifests as a non-invasive clinical syndrome with symptoms that are mild and nonspecific such as fever, headache, muscle aches and pain, and gastrointestinal symptoms. Otherwise healthy persons with suspected *Listeria* non-invasive illness require supportive therapy alone for this self-limiting illness, with no indication for antimicrobial therapy.

In rare cases, individuals may develop severe or invasive listeriosis such as bacteremia and central nervous system infections. Those at high risk include newborns, the elderly, pregnant women and immunocompromised individuals. In pregnant women, infection can cause preterm delivery, spontaneous abortion, stillbirths and fetal infection. Invasive listeriosis should always be treated with intravenous antibiotics. Advice from an infectious diseases physician should be sought when managing a suspected case of invasive listeriosis, if at all possible.

Healthcare professionals should monitor for potential clinical cases of invasive listeriosis and advise the local health unit of suspected cases.

To assist you in answering questions with your patients, please see the information at:

http://www.health.gov.on.ca/english/providers/pub/disease/listeria/listeriosis_clinical_qa_01_20080902.pdf

A fact sheet on how to reduce the risk of listeriosis infection is also available at:

<http://www.health.gov.on.ca/english/public/pub/disease/listeria/fs.html>

Laboratory Testing:

If the patient has a clinical illness compatible with invasive listeriosis the following specimens should be collected and submitted to a local diagnostic laboratory:

- Blood cultures - two sets of blood cultures should be taken from different sites. Collect another set of blood cultures after 48 hrs if the previous cultures are negative and there is ongoing concern of invasive infection with *Listeria monocytogenes*.

- If clinically applicable:
 - Cerebrospinal fluid (CSF)
 - Sterile site fluids and tissues such as joint fluid

If *Listeria monocytogenes* is isolated from any of these sites, the diagnostic lab should forward this isolate to the Ontario Agency for Health Protection and Promotion public health laboratories (PHL) for confirmation and typing.

Please note:

- No serological test is currently available for the diagnosis of listeriosis.
- Stool testing for *Listeria monocytogenes* is not routinely recommended. If a high risk patient has ingested an implicated food product and is symptomatic, stool testing can be arranged through the PHL. Please contact the medical microbiologist at 416-526-5441.

For further information:

Additional information on *Listeria*, including clinical and specimen collection guidelines is available at:

Clinical practice guideline:

<http://www.oahpp.ca/resources/documents/clinicalguidelines/listeria%20monocytogenes%20clinical%20guideline.pdf>

Specimen collection:

<http://www.oahpp.ca/resources/documents/lababstracts/LAB-SD-043-003%20-%20Listeria%20monocytogenes%20Testing-%20Specimen%20Collection%20for%20Foodborne%20Illness.pdf>

Ontario Agency for Health Protection and Promotion
Public Health Laboratory:
HELPLINE at 1-800-640-7221

The Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care will continue to work with its partners and monitor the ongoing investigation.

(original signed by)

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