



UK Health  
Security  
Agency

To  
The Medical Director and Director of Maternity services

01 April 2022

Dear Recipient,

**Re: Update in dietary advice to only consume smoked fish if thoroughly cooked to reduce risk of listeriosis in people who are vulnerable to infection, due to an ongoing outbreak linked to smoked fish**

We are writing to inform you about updated advice on high risk foods for certain patients, where there is a specific concern about *Listeria monocytogenes*.

*L. monocytogenes* is an uncommon cause of food poisoning. The presentation can range from asymptomatic infection, or mild gastroenteritis to severe sepsis or meningitis in people aged over 65, those who are immunocompromised and those with underlying systemic illness like liver or renal disease. Listeriosis can cause miscarriages and still births in pregnant individuals who may be asymptomatic or have very mild symptoms of listeriosis. Newborn babies may acquire perinatal infection including neonatal sepsis and meningitis.

*L. monocytogenes* can be spread through consumption of contaminated food. The best way for patients in vulnerable groups to protect themselves is to follow the guidance on what foods should be avoided and what foods should be handled with care, and to follow advice on appropriate handling, storage and preparation of foods.

We have recommended that the NHS Digital webpages are updated to reflect smoked fish as a high risk product for listeriosis, and advise that vulnerable patients only consume smoked fish if it is thoroughly cooked.

The reason we recommend this change is that there is an ongoing outbreak of listeriosis linked to smoked fish. Since 2020 there have been 12 cases (9 in England, 3 in Scotland) of listeriosis where the vehicle is believed to be smoked fish. While food chain investigations have not revealed any contamination that breaches the legal threshold for

*L. monocytogenes*, it is important that high-risk patients are aware of the risks and are advised how to safely consume these products.

Therefore NHS Digital is updating the NHS Digital website content for pregnant and vulnerable individuals to reflect the risk of listeriosis from smoked fish by amending the [‘foods to avoid in pregnancy’](#) webpage, as well as the NHS Digital webpage on [‘listeriosis’](#), which also includes details on specific actions people can take when handling, storing and preparing foods to reduce their risk of listeriosis.

**We recommend that these changes in advice are cascaded to NHS services and that at-risk patients<sup>1</sup> are directed to the NHS websites above for the most up-to-date advice.**

Yours sincerely

Dr Susan Hopkins  
Chief Medical Advisor, UKHSA

CC  
CMO  
CEX UKHSA

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<sup>1</sup> This includes, but is not limited to, pregnant individuals, newborn babies, people over the age of 65, and those with certain conditions or taking certain treatments which can affect the immune system, such as cancer, organ transplants, patients taking oral steroids, patients undergoing immunosuppressive or cytotoxic treatment including biologics and chemotherapy, those with uncontrolled HIV infection, uncontrolled diabetes, chronic liver or kidney disease, those with alcohol dependency, and those with iron overload.