

# Listeria cases being investigated

Public Health England (PHE), The Food Standards Agency (FSA), Public Health Wales (PHW), Food Standards Scotland (FSS), Health Protection Scotland (HPS) and a number of local authorities are currently investigating the source of listeria infections linked to pre-packed sandwiches.

Sandwiches and salads linked to the cases have been withdrawn and the supplier, The Good Food Chain, has voluntarily ceased production while the investigation continues. This business had been supplied with meat produced by North Country Cooked Meats which subsequently produced a positive test result for the outbreak strain of listeria. This business and North Country Quality Foods who they distribute through, have also voluntarily ceased production.

The cases of listeria infection were in six seriously ill hospital patients in England. Three of these patients have sadly died. Currently there are no cases in Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland.

Listeria infection in healthy people is usually either unnoticed or may cause very mild illness. However, it can have more serious consequences for some people, particularly those with pre-existing health conditions and pregnant women. The health risk to the public remains low and individuals should only seek medical attention if they develop symptoms.

Food Standards Scotland (FSS) and Health Protection Scotland (HPS) are also involved in the investigation and currently there are no cases in Scotland or in Wales.

The sandwiches and salads affected are no longer being produced while investigations continue and the affected products were withdrawn from hospitals when the links to the listeria infections were first identified.

Dr Nick Phin, Deputy Director at the National Infection Service at PHE said:

“Our thoughts are with the families of those patients who have sadly died. We, along with the FSA, colleagues in local authorities and the NHS have worked quickly to determine the likely cause of this outbreak and taken action to reduce the risk to the public’s health.

“To date, there have been no associated cases identified outside healthcare organisations, and any risk to the public is low.”

Dr Colin Sullivan, Chief Operating Officer at the FSA said:

“Our sympathies are with the families of those patients who have tragically passed away.

“We have taken action along with local authorities to minimise the risk based on the evidence so far. The FSA will continue to investigate how the outbreak occurred and if further steps are required to protect vulnerable groups.”

## Information on Listeriosis

Listeriosis is a rare infection and for most people it goes unnoticed or there are mild symptoms of gastroenteritis that usually last a short time without the need for treatment.

The time between exposure to the organism and the development of the illness can be up to 70

days.

Occasionally, however, a more serious infection develops and spreads to the blood stream or brain. This can happen in people who have serious underlying health conditions and can also occur in pregnant women. Pregnant women and people with underlying health conditions can find more information on the [NHS website](#).

The best way to prevent listeriosis is to practice good food hygiene. We advise that chilled food should be put in a fridge or other suitable equipment as soon as it is delivered. Food that is required to be chilled is not permitted to be left out of temperature control for long periods of time.

Food products are permitted to be out of temperature control for limited periods, providing there is no risk to food safety, to accommodate the practicalities of transport and storage.

### **Notes to editors**

- The Trusts that have had cases who have died are Manchester University NHS Foundation Trust and Aintree University Hospital NHS Foundation Trust
- Patients and families have asked for privacy at this time
- Severe listeriosis is more likely to affect the elderly, very young babies, pregnant women and those with a weakened immune system. People in these groups should seek immediate medical attention if they experience symptoms of infection. For advice on avoiding listeriosis during pregnancy, [please visit the NHS website](#)
- We typically see on average 166 annual cases of listeriosis in England and Wales (based on annual case numbers from 2008 -2018). There was an average of 46 deaths in the preceding six years per year (2010 – 2016)
- Following a product withdrawal, Public Health England and Health Protection Scotland have written to their respective NHS Trusts and Boards to ensure that they are following appropriate food storage and handling protocols and to provide clinical guidance