

Public Health Notice: Listeria detection at the Queensland Children's Hospital

24 May 2019

Listeria monocytogenes, the bacteria which causes Listeriosis, has been detected in a batch of commercial sliced ham served to patients and families in the Queensland Children's Hospital between 10 and 20 May 2019.

Listeria is a common bacteria found widely in the environment (soil, water, vegetation) and rarely causes serious illness in people who are in good health.

Those most at risk of developing Listeriosis are pregnant women, the elderly and anyone with a weakened immune system.

The contaminated ham was detected through routine food and safety testing at the hospital and removed from patient menus.

The ham sandwiches were served on platters and snack boxes provided in inpatient wards and the emergency department. Ham salads were also served in inpatient wards. Some parents and carers may also have eaten the sandwiches or salads.

The ham was NOT available to inpatients on the Bone Marrow Transplant ward, who would be most at risk due to their immunocompromised state.

Children's Health Queensland is working closely with the Chief Health Officer and the Metro South Public Health Unit to ensure the health and safety of all patients and families who may have consumed the sandwiches at the hospital.

As a precaution, patients and families who were in the affected wards and departments between 10 and 20 May are being contacted directly and made aware of the signs and symptoms of Listeriosis.

No cases of Listeriosis-related sickness have been reported in or to the Queensland Children's Hospital to date.

Further testing has been undertaken to determine the source of the bacteria.

Listeriosis is mainly spread by eating contaminated food.



The incubation period (the time between infection and symptoms) after eating food contaminated with listeria is about three weeks on average but can be between three and 70 days.

Signs, symptoms and treatment

Signs and symptoms of Listeriosis include minor complaints such as fever, headache, aches and pains, vomiting and diarrhoea. Listeriosis can be treated successfully with antibiotics.

Parents have been advised that if their child develops any of the above signs and symptoms and ate ham sandwiches or ham salad at the Queensland Children's Hospital between 10 and 20 May, to seek advice from their local GP.

Recommended actions

GPs are advised that Listeria is generally a mild illness not requiring treatment or investigation in those who are immunocompetent and not pregnant. Anyone presenting seriously unwell should be sent to the Emergency department.

Individuals who present with mild gastroenteritis-like symptoms who are immunocompetent should expect resolution within 24 hours.

Immunocompromised patients who present well with gastroenteritis should have blood cultures, and be treated empirically with Amoxicillin at 15mg/kg tds for 3-5 days, in consultation with the treating team. Any pregnant or immunocompromised patient presenting with fever or unwell should be sent to emergency.

Immunocompetent individuals who are febrile warrant a low threshold for blood cultures.

Stool samples are not routinely indicated.

If you have a query about any patient regarding this advice, please call the Queensland Children's Hospital on 07 3068 1111 and speak with the infectious disease registrar

Kind regards

Dr Aaron Chambers
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Children's Health Queensland

