

Issue date
8 September 2023

Distributed to:

Chief Executives
Directors of Clinical Governance
Director, Regulation and Compliance Unit

Action required by:

Chief Executives
Directors of Clinical Governance

We recommend you also inform:

Directors, Managers and Staff of:

- Medical Services
- Nutrition and Dietetics Services
- Oncology Services
- Renal Services
- Transplant Services
- Maternity Services
- Pharmacy Services
- Nursing and Midwifery Services

Other relevant staff, committees and departments.

Expert Reference Group

Content reviewed by:
Health Protection NSW
CEC Patient Safety
CEC Medication Safety

Clinical Excellence Commission

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Review date
September 2024

Vigilance required: Increase in listeriosis cases in NSW

Situation

There has been a recent rise in the number of people with invasive listeriosis being treated in hospital, as well as a steady increase in notifications since April 2022. There have been 25 cases of listeriosis among NSW residents in the past nine months to September 2023. There have been 22 cases of listeriosis on average per calendar year in NSW from 2018-2022.

Background

Listeriosis is a rare infection caused by eating food contaminated with the bacterium *Listeria monocytogenes*. The Listeria bacteria are common in the environment and some raw foods. Although rare, listeriosis has a high mortality rate even with treatment.

Assessment

Given the rise in listeriosis presentations in NSW this year, heightened vigilance is required in patient groups at high risk of listeriosis including, but not limited to:

- pregnant women and their unborn child, and subsequent newborns
- people aged over 65
- people with underlying health conditions, including those with renal disease, cancer, diabetes, cardiac disease, hepatic disease or HIV infection
- people taking regular medications that lower their immunity, including oral steroids and immune suppressants, such as people being treated for inflammatory arthritis.

Clinical Recommendations

- Ensure patients at higher risk of listeriosis (as outlined above) receive appropriate education and counselling on prevention including foods to avoid, safe food handling advice and symptoms of listeriosis. Provide written information to patients where possible (for example, [NSW Health](#) and [FSANZ](#) factsheets). Patient education is a shared responsibility amongst members of the multidisciplinary team.
- Notify your Public Health Unit (on 1300 066 055) of any suspected or confirmed cases of listeriosis. Listeriosis starts with flu-like symptoms such as fever, chills, muscle aches, nausea, and sometimes diarrhoea.
- Be aware that the incubation period (from exposure to symptoms) is on average 3 weeks (varies between 3 to 70 days).
- Blood or cerebrospinal fluid cultures/PCR are generally required to [confirm the diagnosis](#). Treatment is with intravenous antibiotics and supportive therapy – Refer to [Therapeutic Guidelines: Antibiotic](#), local guidelines and Infectious Diseases/Microbiology services for further advice.

Required actions for the Local Health Districts/Networks

1. Distribute this Safety Notice to all relevant clinicians and clinical departments, and include a copy in relevant handovers and safety huddles.
2. Continue to notify your Public Health Unit (on 1300 066 055) of any suspected or confirmed cases of listeriosis.
3. Consider the clinical recommendations provided in this Safety Notice and develop a local action plan. Escalate any concerns to your local Public Health Unit (on 1300 066 055).
4. Confirm receipt and distribution of this Safety Notice within **72 hours** to NSWH-OneHealth@health.nsw.gov.au.