



# Listeria; A Potential Risk for Food Safety and Public Health

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## Editorial

*Listeria monocytogenes* a well-known food borne pathogen and cause one of the most serious and life threatening disease, listeriosis. Although all aspects of these bacteria such as routes of infection, pathogenesis, prevention and control have been extensively studied, still remains a potential risk for food safety and public health [1,2].

There are several reasons which make *Listeria* a virulent food borne pathogen due to its ability to multiply at refrigeration temperatures and survive under many food processing conditions such as extreme pH, high salt concentration and low water activity [3].

*Listeria* is spread widely in nature (soil, water and animal digestive tracts). It is not able to tolerate pasteurization temperature, so food that most often associated with listeriosis are those consumed without further heat treatment such as Ready-to-Eat food (RTE) like prepared salads and sandwiches. *Listeria monocytogenes* can also form biofilms through attaching food contact surfaces such as stainless steel and polystyrene during food processing which lead its survival in hostile environments [4,5].

While the infections rate are low, as they are associated with high mortality rates particularly in immune compromised individuals therefore this pathogen is a major concern for public health and food industry [6,7].

*Listeria monocytogenes* represents a constant challenge for global public health, Since by WHO report, an outbreak of listeriosis in South Africa, has been ongoing from the start of 2017 [8]. The National Institute for Communicable Diseases (NICD) has confirmed 978 laboratory cases, between 1<sup>st</sup> January 2017 through 14<sup>th</sup> March 2018 from all provinces. Most of the infected cases are high risk individuals for a severe disease outcome, such as neonates, pregnant women, elderly and immune compromised persons. In this outbreak, 42% of the cases are neonates who were infected during pregnancy or delivery. WHO warned this is the largest outbreak of listeriosis globally that has been detected. They expect further cases due to the potentially long incubation period of listeriosis before the impact of the food recall is observed [8].

In conclusion, repetitive microbiological food testing is required for early detection and prevents food contamination and outbreaks of food borne illness. The best approach to control and manage *Listeria monocytogenes* in the food chain are Good Hygiene Practices (GHP), Good Manufacturing Practices (GMP), food safety/hygiene training and the application of a Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point (HACCP) system beside to consumer awareness raising about risks of this pathogen bacteria.

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