

**Communicable Disease Epidemiology  
and Immunization Section**

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**Health Advisory - Foodborne outbreak of listeriosis associated with restaurant milkshakes in Pierce County, September 4, 2023**

**Action requested**

- **Be aware of a *Listeria monocytogenes* (*L. monocytogenes*) outbreak associated with consuming milkshakes from the Frugals restaurant in Tacoma, Washington.**
- **Consider listeriosis in high-risk individuals (aged 65 years or older, immunocompromised, or pregnant) who consumed contaminated milkshakes from the Frugals restaurant in Tacoma prior to August 8, 2023.**
  - Listeriosis has an estimated incubation period of 3-70 days (median of 3 weeks) and clinical presentation may vary by different [risk groups](#):
    - **Individuals aged  $\geq 65$  years and people with immunocompromising conditions** – most common clinical presentations are invasive infections such as sepsis, meningitis and meningoenzephalitis; people can also experience focal infections, including septic arthritis, osteomyelitis, prosthetic graft infections, and infections of sites inside the chest and abdomen or of the skin and eye.
    - **People who are pregnant**– typically a relatively mild “flu-like” illness. Some pregnant people with *Listeria* infection have no symptoms. Rarely, severe disease can result in miscarriage, stillbirth, preterm labor, and sepsis or meningitis in the neonate.
    - **Immunocompetent** – rarely develop invasive infections. May experience a self-limited acute febrile gastroenteritis following a high-dose *Listeria* exposure.
- **Order laboratory testing if clinical history suggests listeriosis.**
  - Forward *L. monocytogenes* positive specimens to the Washington State Public Health Laboratory for serotyping and whole genome sequencing (WGS).
- **Routinely advise patients aged  $\geq 65$  years, people with immunocompromising conditions, pregnant people and newborns, on how they can [choose safer foods](#) to protect their health or their pregnancy.**
  - Avoid unpasteurized dairy products, unheated deli meat, cold cuts, hot dogs, and fermented or dry sausages, premade deli salads (e.g., coleslaw and potato, tuna, or chicken salads), raw or lightly cooked sprouts, refrigerated smoked fish, refrigerated pâté or meat spreads, and cut melon (if left out for more than 2 hours or in the refrigerator for more than a week).
  - In the last few years, listeriosis outbreaks have been associated with certain pasteurized frozen desserts like [ice cream \(hard and soft serve\)](#), [packaged salads](#), and [raw enoki mushrooms](#).
- **Report suspected listeriosis cases associated with this outbreak to Public Health at (206) 296 - 4774 within 24 hours.**

**Background**

Between February 27 and July 22, 2023, six Washington residents (five from Pierce County and one from Thurston County) developed severe illness due to listeriosis. All six cases had conditions which made their immune system less able to fight disease. Three patients died. *Listeria monocytogenes* cultured from the six cases were closely related by genetic fingerprinting (WGS) to *L. monocytogenes* bacteria collected from the milkshake machines at the Frugals restaurant in Tacoma. The contaminated machines have not

been in operation since August 8, 2023, and will be kept out of service until the Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department determines they are free of *Listeria* contamination and no longer pose a danger to the public. No other [Frugals restaurant locations](#), including the Auburn, King County location has been associated with any *Listeria* infections. In recent years, the Washington State Department of Health received 11 to 29 reports of listeriosis per year with 0-5 deaths, primarily among the elderly with rare neonatal fatalities.

### Resources

- [Listeria \(Listeriosis\) Information for Health Professionals and Laboratories](#), CDC
- [Prevent Listeria](#), CDC
- [Listeria \(Listeriosis\) Information](#), Public Health – Seattle & King County
- [2023 Outbreak of Foodborne Listeriosis Associated with Consumption of Restaurant Milkshakes](#), WA State Department of Health

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