

Listeriosis Investigation

Toronto Public Health (TPH) has observed an increase in the number of listeriosis cases reported since January 2010. The five year average for Toronto has been 2.6 cases from January through to the end of March; this year, as of March 11, six cases have been reported to-date. The Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care has noted a similar increase for the province and the Chief Medical Officer of Health issued a media advisory on March 12th. TPH is working closely with provincial and federal agencies to investigate this and minimize the risk of any further cases.

As a result of this investigation, on March 12th and 13th, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) announced recalls of three prepared meat products manufactured by Siena Foods Ltd. in Toronto, due to possible contamination with listeria bacteria. The three products are Siena brand Prosciutto Cotto Cooked Ham, Siena brand Coppa and Siena brand Prosciuttini or Prosciuttini Hot. Details of these products can be found at the CFIA website:

<http://www.inspection.gc.ca/english/corpafr/recarapp/recaltoce.shtml>

Listeriosis is an uncommon bacterial infection with approximately 11 cases reported in Toronto annually. In the immunocompetent host, the infection may present as a mild febrile illness. However, pregnant women, newborns, the elderly, and immunocompromised individuals are at risk of severe disease. Meningitis, endocarditis, sepsis, and, in perinatal infections, fetal loss may occur. Listeriosis is diagnosed through culture of fluid from a sterile site (normally blood or CSF).

The most common mode of transmission for Listeria bacteria is through foodborne exposure. Commonly implicated foods have been hot dogs, deli meats, and unpasteurized cheeses. Symptoms can occur from 1 to 70 days following exposure. The Canadian Food Inspection Agency, the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care and TPH have been working together to identify potential food sources. Any items that are suspected to be contaminated are routinely recalled. However, high risk patients, such as pregnant women and immunocompromised patients should be reminded of the importance of preventative measures to reduce their risk. These include safe food handling, and avoiding high risk products such as unpasteurized milk and soft cheeses, ready-to-eat deli meats, and smoked fish.

Listeriosis is a reportable communicable disease. Please report all suspect and confirmed cases of listeriosis to Toronto Public Health immediately by calling 416-392-7411 (during work hours) and 416-690-2142 (after hours).

For more information see the TPH fact sheet on listeriosis at:
http://www.toronto.ca/health/cdc/factsheets/pdf/fs_listeriosis.pdf