

## **FACT SHEET**

### **Listeria**

#### **Common clinical features**

Infection may cause a mild acute illness with fever and may be associated with diarrhoea. Asymptomatic systemic infection can occur. In pregnant women the infection can be transmitted to the foetus and cause septicaemia and meningitis and spontaneous abortion. Septicaemia and meningitis also occur in adults, usually in older people or the immunocompromised.

#### **Incubation period**

Variable 3 – 70 days

#### **Where is it found?**

Environment, cattle, sheep, soil, silage. The bacterium has been isolated from a range of raw foods including vegetables and uncooked meats as well as processed foods. A wide range of food products have been implicated in outbreaks including soft cheeses and meat based patés. It is commonly carried in the human gut.

#### **How is it acquired by affected individuals?**

The majority of cases are believed to be food borne, from foods where the counts are very high because of contamination or poor storage. Some cases are from direct contact with animals. The organism can be transmitted from mother to foetus in utero or at delivery. Infants may acquire infection from person to person spread shortly after delivery.

#### **How does the laboratory confirm the diagnosis?**

Culture of blood and cerebrospinal fluid for cases of systemic infection. Culture of faecal specimens in cases with diarrhoea as the main symptom. Results are usually available within 2 days. This test would only be carried out if infection with Listeria was strongly suspected.

#### **How is it treated?**

No specific treatment for diarrhoeal illness. Antibiotics are required for treatment of systemic illness.