



New USDA Microbiological Data Underscores Success of Industry Efforts to Eradicate *Listeria* on Ready-to-Eat Meat and Poultry Products

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Arlington, Va. - USDA's newly released microbiological data, showing a one-year, 25 percent drop in the incidence of *Listeria monocytogenes* on ready-to-eat meat and poultry products and a 70 percent decline over the last five years, indicates that hot dogs, deli meats and other ready-to-eat products are safer than ever.

For information on the microbiological testing program, [click here](#).

[link to <http://www.fsis.usda.gov/ophs/rtetest/>]

The decline in the incidence of *Listeria monocytogenes* on ready-to-eat meat and poultry products announced by USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service coincides with the transition to a more science-based meat and poultry inspection system in 1998. From the time that *Listeria monocytogenes* was recognized as a potential risk, the meat and poultry industry has taken a number of key actions that have also helped reduce *Listeria monocytogenes*. These are numerous and can include:

- Training of industry and federal inspection staff through comprehensive *Listeria* control workshops;
- Use of a thermal treatment after a product has been packaged to destroy *Listeria monocytogenes*;
- Use of new ingredients to inhibit the growth of *Listeria monocytogenes* on ready-to-eat meat and poultry: Many products now contain these ingredients;
- Development of new principles for processing equipment design that facilitate sanitation and reduce the possibility of bacteria being "harbored" in tiny spaces like the thread of an exposed screw or a hollow roller on a conveyer belt;
- Sophisticated new environmental sampling programs that work to target *Listeria* in the plant environment so it can be destroyed before it is transferred to products;
- Research to discover new technologies;
- Declaration by the meat and poultry industry that food safety is a "non-competitive issue," which resulted in the free exchange of food safety information among competitors.

Listeria monocytogenes is widespread in the environment. The bacteria can grow in cold temperatures like home refrigerators and food processing plants. The bacteria can cause listeriosis in at-risk populations that include pregnant women, immuno-compromised people and the elderly.

"In 1999, this industry declared that its goal was to reduce and ultimately eliminate *Listeria*

monocytogenes on ready-to-eat meat and poultry products. While we haven't hit zero yet, we are getting very close," said AMI President J. Patrick Boyle. "USDA's data showing a 70 percent reduction in this bacteria on ready-to-eat meat and poultry products are gratifying and reassures us that our efforts are moving us in the right direction."

Also in the good news category, listeriosis cases are down substantially, according to Centers for Disease Control data. Since 1996, foodborne illnesses attributable to *Listeria* have declined 38 percent. The U.S. is very close to achieving its national health objective of no more than one listeriosis case per 400,000 population, well ahead of the target set for 2010.