

## MEDIA MATERIALS

1. **Getting Started: How to Get the Media and Community Interested in Your Message**
2. **Getting the Word Out Through Media**
3. ***Listeriosis and the Hispanic Community* Backgrounder**
4. **Matte Article: The Danger of Eating Queso Fresco Made From Unpasteurized Milk**
5. **Listeriosis: Frequently Asked Questions**
6. **Glossary of Terms**



### Getting Started: How to Get the Media and Community Interested in Your Message

Dear Health Educator,

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration is seeking your participation in educating consumers in your community about the risk of *Listeria monocytogenes*. When pregnant women eat traditional Mexican-style soft cheeses made from unpasteurized milk, they are putting their unborn babies at risk. These cheeses can contain the *Listeria* bacterium. *Listeria* causes listeriosis, a dangerous foodborne disease that can cause serious illness or death. The Hispanic community is at particular risk due to traditional dietary habits and the greater likelihood of eating cheeses made from “raw” or unpasteurized milk.

It is imperative to inform these at-risk pregnant women that they should NOT eat soft Mexican-style cheeses made from unpasteurized milk. These cheeses include Queso Fresco, Panela, Asadero, and Queso Blanco.

What can you do? The answers lie in the *Preventing Listeriosis in Pregnant Hispanic Women in the U.S.* Community Educator’s Guide, which has been designed to assist organizations in conducting state and local education programs and campaigns. Developed for flexible use, this guide provides both media and consumer education materials in English and Spanish that can be tailored to your particular area and distributed at a variety of local venues. Please take a moment to look through the materials and make a commitment to include this information in your education plans.

**Thank you for your help!**



### Getting the Word Out Through Media

As a public health educator, you have a unique opportunity to reach your target audience through the media, particularly local media outlets. You are no doubt aware that today's working print and electronic journalists are busier than ever, as are you. Reporters are besieged by press releases and spot news that must be covered on an immediate basis. Everyone wants to get their messages across in this age of digital information, and that job is getting tougher for you, the public health educator.

The sample materials included in the *Preventing Listeriosis in Pregnant Hispanic Women in the U.S.:* Community Educator's Guide are designed to educate the media and the Hispanic community about the threat of listeriosis from eating Mexican-style soft cheeses made with unpasteurized milk, including Queso Fresco, Panela, Asadero, and Queso Blanco. You will need to localize the information for your particular area. It also will be necessary to identify a bilingual spokesperson or expert in your community, as Hispanic media will want to interview someone in Spanish.

#### **For The Print Journalist – General Market**

The health beat reporter today is deluged with press releases on everything from the latest in home health products to new prescription medications. Although the Internet helps to break through that clutter, you must still be able to deliver a package of information that is clear, concise, and most importantly, communicates the angle on why your story is important. To the extent possible, it is always helpful to provide local statistics such as the percentage of Hispanics living in your market, reports of local outbreaks of listeriosis, and other information that helps "localize" the news.

#### **The Spanish-Language Print Journalist**

In many cases, the print journalist at a Spanish-language newspaper or magazine may not be a health reporter. You may need to contact the editor or a reporter that covers metro or lifestyle issues. The best way to make that determination is to read the publication or to place a call and ask who the right contact is. In some cases, the print outlets that you are targeting are bilingual and may print information in both English and Spanish. The media materials accompanying the Community Educator's Guide are ideally suited for that scenario.



### **The Electronic Journalist**

Network news affiliates and independent television "health beat" reporters are always looking for strong visual stories about the world of health and medicine.

To build interest among electronic journalists and promote the proactive, educational aspect of your program, you may want to have video B-roll shot from which you can create a localized message for your campaign. B-roll is a term used by the broadcast media for footage from which a story and narrative or voice-over is developed. A short video (2-3 minutes) can feature sound bytes with your local experts in Spanish and English to enable local television stations to produce news stories, whether experts are available or not.

Press materials for the electronic journalist should include a news release, the media backgrounder on listeriosis, and pre-produced B-roll video footage, if your budget allows for this filming.

### **In the Event of Breaking News...**

The materials in the Community Educator's Guide are designed to meet the needs of a planned communications program. In the event of breaking news, such as a local listeriosis outbreak, you may need to prepare a media statement specifically addressing the matter. In that case, the materials in the guide are ideally suited to provide additional background to your specific situation.

### **Spokespersons**

The ideal spokesperson is a member of your local health department or a physician, as he or she will carry the greatest authority with the Hispanic market. Depending on the scope of the news, national versus local, it is strongly recommended that the spokesperson receive media training on key messages prior to the launch of a media tour to ensure that he or she stays on point with the education message and is knowledgeable about the key facts surrounding mortality and morbidity related to listeriosis are accurate.

### *Listeriosis and the Hispanic Community*

#### Background

Listeriosis is a serious illness caused by eating foods contaminated with the *Listeria monocytogenes* (“*Listeria*”) bacterium.

- **Listeria** is commonly found in soil, water, decaying vegetation, and the intestinal tract of animals. The bacterium has been found in foods that become contaminated after processing, such as deli meats, soft cheeses, and other foods made from unpasteurized milk.
- Cooking and commercial processes like pasteurization destroy *Listeria*, thus reducing potential risk of exposure to humans.

As Hispanics immigrate to the United States, the search for authentic tastes from home unknowingly puts the community at risk for listeriosis. The most common cause is eating homemade “Queso Fresco” cheese made from unpasteurized (raw) milk. This soft, white cheese is a staple in many Hispanic diets, and many feel it tastes better when prepared with unpasteurized milk. However, this preference **puts many Hispanics at risk for listeriosis**.

Aspiring Latino entrepreneurs have been known to purchase raw milk and use it to make homemade cheese, then sell it door-to-door or from an ice chest in their communities.

- Cheese made from raw milk can be contaminated because the milk has not been pasteurized to destroy any presence of *Listeria*.
- Contamination may be facilitated by poor hygiene (such as lack of proper hand washing) or lack of refrigeration of the product. Food should be refrigerated at 40°F (4°C) or below.

Individuals, particularly those at high risk for listeriosis, such as pregnant women, older adults, or people who have weakened immune systems, can develop the illness within a few days or even weeks after eating the contaminated cheese.

### **Pregnant Hispanic Women at Greater Risk than Other Populations**

Listeriosis affects people of all races and genders. However, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), pregnant women are about 10 times more likely than other healthy adults to get listeriosis and suffer severe symptoms. Pregnant Hispanic women are about 24 times more likely than the general population to get listeriosis. Hormonal changes that occur during pregnancy affect the mother's immune system, which leads to greater susceptibility to listeriosis. About one in seven (14%) of all listeriosis cases in the United States occur in pregnant women.

Although there is no screening test for listeriosis, pregnant women (and individuals who have weakened immune systems) who believe they may be infected should seek medical attention immediately. A doctor may prescribe antibiotics. For a pregnant woman, antibiotics that are safe to use during pregnancy may be prescribed to get rid of the mother's infection. Antibiotics may also be given to babies who are born with listeriosis.

### **Education and Prevention Are Key**

The U.S. Government – particularly agencies such as the U. S. Food and Drug Administration, U.S. Department of Agriculture, and CDC – has created a series of educational initiatives and works with the media and community-based organizations to raise awareness about the importance of food safety and proper food preparation and handling. Consumers can follow these four simple steps to minimize their likelihood of getting listeriosis:

- **Clean:** Before, during, and after food preparation, wash your hands and kitchen surfaces often with hot water and soap. *Listeria* can grow at refrigerator temperatures, so clean your refrigerator regularly and wipe up spills inside immediately. Use hot water and a mild liquid dishwashing detergent, then rinse thoroughly.
- **Separate:** Keep raw meats separate from other foods, such as fruits and vegetables.
- **Cook:** Thoroughly cook and reheat food to a safe internal temperature before eating. Thoroughly cook meat, poultry, and seafood.
- **Chill:** Your refrigerator should register at 40°F (4°C) or below. Place a refrigerator thermometer in the refrigerator and check the temperature periodically. Store perishable foods that are pre-cooked or ready-to-eat in your refrigerator and eat them *as soon as possible*.

**If you are pregnant or have a weakened immune system (HIV/AIDS, cancer, kidney disease, or diabetes), do not eat:**

- Soft Mexican-style cheeses, such as Queso Fresco, Panela, Asadero, or Queso Blanco unless they are purchased from a reputable market with labels clearly stating that they are “made with pasteurized milk.”
- Foods that contain unpasteurized milk.
- Hot dogs and luncheon meats – unless you reheat them until steaming hot. Avoid getting juices from hot dogs on other foods and utensils. Wash your hands before and after handling hot dogs and luncheon meats.
- Refrigerated pâtés or meat spreads. Canned or shelf-stable pâtés and meat spreads may be eaten.
- Refrigerated, smoked seafood – unless it’s in a cooked dish, such as a cooked casserole.

The value of word of mouth and community awareness cannot be underestimated – especially in communities where access to media and medical professionals may be limited. It is essential to encourage self-policing and enforce the importance that cheese and dairy products sold by stores – regardless of size – be pasteurized and from recognized brands.

Vendors and local suppliers must understand the danger of selling soft cheeses made with unpasteurized milk, as they may be unaware that the “Queso Fresco” they are providing to their community may be endangering the life of an unborn child.

For more information on this topic in Spanish or English, visit [www.fda.gov](http://www.fda.gov).

###



### THE DANGER OF EATING QUESO FRESCO MADE FROM UNPASTEURIZED MILK

***The U.S. Food and Drug Administration warns Hispanic community and pregnant Hispanic women about the risks of eating cheese made from unpasteurized milk.***

What do some of our favorite foods like quesadillas, tacos, and enchiladas all have in common? They often are topped with delicious Queso Fresco cheese. Although this is a popular food for many Hispanics, officials from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) warn that if you are pregnant (or have a weakened immune system due to age or a chronic disease such as cancer), eating homemade Queso Fresco made with unpasteurized milk can harm you or your unborn child. Homemade Queso Fresco has often been found to be contaminated with a bacterium called *Listeria*, which causes a serious illness called listeriosis, according to the FDA. Cheese made with unpasteurized milk is sometimes sold door-to-door or from vendor carts, or is brought into the United States from Mexico or Latin America.

#### **What Is *Listeria*?**

*Listeria monocytogenes* is a bacterium that is commonly found in soil, water, decaying vegetation, and the intestinal tract of animals. The bacterium has been found in foods that become contaminated after processing, such as deli meats, and soft cheeses and other foods made from unpasteurized milk. If a person consumes foods with *Listeria* it can cause listeriosis. This is especially dangerous for pregnant women because listeriosis can cause a miscarriage, stillbirth, or impairment of a newborn baby.

#### **Am I Infected?**

Listeriosis can develop within a few days or even weeks after eating the contaminated cheese. Symptoms include:

- Fever
- Chills
- Muscle aches
- Upset stomach
- Nausea
- Diarrhea





If infection spreads to the nervous system, headaches, stiff neck, confusion, loss of balance, or convulsions can occur. In extreme cases, death can occur. Pregnant women may experience mild flu-like symptoms or may not feel sick at all, yet the infection can still severely affect their unborn babies.

### **Outbreaks Across the United States**

As consumers of Queso Fresco, Hispanics need to understand that consuming any cheeses made with unpasteurized milk may put you at risk of listeriosis. Homemade Queso Fresco, Queso Blanco, Panela, or Asadero-style cheeses are only considered safe when purchased at a store and marked with a professional label stating that it is “pasteurized” or “made from pasteurized milk,” says FDA.

“Outbreaks have become a serious issue in the Hispanic community because of an apparent taste preference for raw milk cheeses and the cultural popularity of making it homemade for both consuming and selling purposes,” said a public affairs representative at the FDA. “The FDA would like the community to be aware that this practice is very dangerous. Any cheese made from raw milk can be contaminated with *Listeria* and other harmful bacteria because the milk has not gone through the pasteurization process to destroy any presence of bacteria, which can result in sickness or death.”

### **Information**

Vendors and local suppliers must understand the danger of selling homemade soft cheeses made with unpasteurized milk because the Queso Fresco cheese they are providing to their community may be endangering the life of their family, neighbors, or an unborn child.

For more information on listeriosis in Spanish or English check [www.fda.gov](http://www.fda.gov) or call 1-800-SAFEFOOD (English only).

###



### Listeriosis: Frequently Asked Questions

**What is listeriosis?** It is a serious illness caused by eating food contaminated with the bacterium *Listeria monocytogenes*. This disease primarily affects pregnant women and their unborn babies, newborns, and other people with weakened immune systems.

**How do you get listeriosis?** By consuming the bacterium *Listeria monocytogenes*, commonly found in soil, water, decaying vegetation, and the intestinal tract of animals. The bacterium has been found in foods that become contaminated after processing, such as deli meats, soft cheeses, and other foods made from unpasteurized milk.

**What are the symptoms of listeriosis?** A person may experience fever, chills, muscle aches, nausea, diarrhea, or upset stomach. If infection spreads to the nervous system, headaches, stiff neck, confusion, loss of balance, or convulsions can occur. In extreme cases, death can occur.

**Pregnant women** may experience mild flu-like symptoms or may not feel sick at all, yet the infection can still severely affect their unborn babies. Listeriosis can lead to miscarriage, stillbirth, premature labor, or the delivery of a low birthweight infant. The illness can also lead to a wide range of health problems for a newborn, or infant death.

**What is the incubation period?** The symptoms of listeriosis can take a few days or even weeks to appear. People who believe that they may have been exposed should see a doctor immediately.

#### Who is at greatest risk?

- **Pregnant women** – who are 10 times more likely than other healthy adults to get listeriosis. Approximately one in seven (14%) of all cases occur in pregnant women.
- **Newborns and fetuses** – who can contract listeriosis from their mothers.
- **Persons with weakened immune systems** (such as those with cancer, HIV/AIDS, kidney disease, or diabetes).
- **Older adults.**

**Are Latinos at greater risk for listeriosis?** Latinos are not more *susceptible* to listeriosis; however, in the United States, the incidence of this infection is believed to be higher among pregnant Hispanic women than pregnant non-Hispanic women due to the likelihood of Latinos consuming homemade “Queso Fresco”-style cheeses from local vendors. This cheese is frequently made with unpasteurized milk, and many cases of listeriosis within Hispanic communities have been linked to eating homemade cheeses. Pregnant Hispanic women are about 24 times more likely than the general population to get a *Listeria* infection.

**How can listeriosis be treated?** A doctor may prescribe antibiotics. For a pregnant woman, antibiotics that are safe to use during pregnancy may be prescribed to get rid of her infection. Antibiotics may also be given to babies who are born with listeriosis.

**How do you prevent listeriosis?** Follow these four simple steps to minimize your likelihood of getting this foodborne illness:

- **Clean:** Before, during, and after food preparation, wash your hands and kitchen surfaces often with hot water and soap. Unlike some other foodborne bacteria, ***Listeria* can grow at refrigerator temperatures**, so clean your refrigerator regularly and wipe up spills inside immediately. Use hot water and a mild liquid dishwashing detergent, then rinse thoroughly and dry with a clean cloth or paper towel.
- **Separate:** Keep raw meats separate from other foods, such as fruits and vegetables.
- **Cook:** Thoroughly cook and reheat food to a safe internal temperature before eating. Thoroughly cook meat, poultry, and seafood.
- **Chill:** Your refrigerator should register at 40°F (4°C) or below. Place a refrigerator thermometer in the refrigerator and check the temperature periodically. Store perishable foods that are pre-cooked or ready-to-eat in your refrigerator and eat them *as soon as possible*.

**If you are pregnant or have a weakened immune system (HIV/AIDS, cancer, kidney disease, or diabetes) do not eat:**

- Queso Fresco – soft, white, moist cheeses, such as “Panela,” “Asadero,” or “Queso Blanco” – unless it is purchased from a reputable market with labels clearly stating that it is “pasteurized” or “made with pasteurized milk.”
- Foods that contain unpasteurized milk.
- Hot dogs and luncheon meats – unless you reheat them until steaming hot. Avoid getting juices from hot dogs on other foods and utensils. Wash your hands before and after handling hot dogs and luncheon meats.
- Refrigerated pâtés or meat spreads. Canned or shelf-stable pâtés and meat spreads may be eaten.
- Refrigerated, smoked seafood – unless it’s in a cooked dish, such as a cooked casserole.

###



### Glossary of Terms

**Homogenization** – The process of breaking up cream/fat into very tiny particles in milk. Homogenization creates a smoother consistency, **but does not pasteurize the milk or kill potentially harmful bacteria.** (See pasteurization, below).

**Incubation** – The period of time between infection with bacteria or viruses and the beginning of symptoms. For example, if person eats contaminated cheese and gets sick 2 days later, the incubation time for that illness is 2 days.

***Listeria monocytogenes*** – A harmful bacterium that causes a foodborne illness called listeriosis. The bacteria may be found in refrigerated, ready-to-eat foods (meat, poultry, and seafood) and dairy products made with unpasteurized milk. Unlike other foodborne bacteria, *Listeria monocytogenes* will grow even at refrigerated temperatures. Eating food contaminated with *Listeria* may result in listeriosis.

**Listeriosis** – A serious illness caused by eating food contaminated with the bacterium *Listeria monocytogenes*. These foods may include luncheon meats, hot dogs, or cheese made with contaminated, unpasteurized milk. This disease primarily affects pregnant women and their unborn babies, newborns, and other people with weakened immune systems. A person with listeriosis may experience fever, chills, muscle aches, nausea, diarrhea, or upset stomach. If infection spreads to the nervous system, headaches, stiff neck, confusion, loss of balance, or convulsions can occur. In extreme cases, death can occur. Pregnant women may experience mild flu-like symptoms or may not feel sick at all, yet the infection can still severely affect their unborn babies. Listeriosis can lead to miscarriage, stillbirth, premature labor, the delivery of a low birthweight infant, a wide range of health problems for a newborn, or infant death.

**Luncheon Meats** – Processed and/or prepackaged meat often molded into a loaf and served sliced and cold for use in sandwiches or salads. Sometimes called deli meats or “cold cuts,” luncheon meats can be found in packages in the refrigerated section or at the deli counter. They include bologna, ham, turkey, roast beef, turkey loaf, and other “ready-to-eat” meats.

**Pasteurization** – The process of heating a food or liquid (such as milk) at a controlled temperature for a fixed period of time in order to kill harmful bacteria.



**Queso Fresco** – A soft, Mexican-style cheese that can be found at local grocery stores or Hispanic tiendas and bodegas. “Queso Fresco” can refer to a **type** of cheese and also to the overall **style** of cheese. Other “Queso Fresco”-style cheeses include Queso Blanco, Panela, and Asadero.

**Raw Milk** – Milk that is not pasteurized or heated to destroy harmful bacteria.

