

# A PRESUMPTIVE *Listeria* POSITIVE TEST RESULT

What to do if the laboratory finds *Listeria monocytogenes* in your product.

If your food business produces ready-to-eat food that will be stored in refrigeration for more than five days before consumption, then you need to answer the following questions:

## Where is the product?

- If it hasn't been shipped, put any deliveries on hold
- If it has been shipped, you should review your food recall plan, as a recall is likely. Refer to your food recall plan or the FSANZ Recall Protocol to determine who you should contact and when they must be informed.
- Between 2004 and 2012, 30% of recalls notified to FSANZ were due to microbial contamination. The leading cause (48%) was *Listeria*. In the US, over 90% of *Listeria* recalls were due to the plant failing to hold product being tested. Where possible, a product being tested should not be released into the marketplace if an adverse result could lead to a recall.

## How is a 'batch' defined by the manufacturer?

Is it just one product, or is it a full day's production? Do other products have to be put on hold or included in the recall?

## Were there any warning signs?

- How were the results trending for the environmental sampling? (repeated detection of *Listeria* in environmental samples indicates a problem)
- Were there any changes to the manufacturing area?
- Were there any staff changes, e.g. new cleaners with new cleaning chemicals?

## Does the factory have equipment with a history of harbouring *Listeria*?

- Conveyors (angles, rollers, carriage tracks)
- Slicers, dicers, mincers
- Rubber seals around doors
- Insulation material
- Packaging equipment, hand tools
- Air conditioning units
- Packing tables
- Drains, floors, walls
- Ice making machines

## Do you have the following conditions that allow *Listeria* to grow?

- Areas where the combination of water, food particles and temperature support the growth of bacteria
- There is condensate in the production areas
- Equipment that is difficult to clean or cleaned infrequently
- Equipment which *Listeria* can stick to, e.g. a door seal (sometimes there is no obvious food source for *Listeria* to develop)
- Lower temperatures in the growth range mean fewer competitors.

## Are there any equipment problems?

- Scratched or porous food contact surfaces
- Poor water drainage from food contact surfaces
- Seams or small gaps in equipment that cannot be cleaned properly
- Pierced or hollow components where food particles or water can accumulate



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More resources at [foodauthority.nsw.gov.au](http://foodauthority.nsw.gov.au)



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## Do you need to do some intensive environmental testing?

- Take several samples after production, but before cleaning and sanitation. Run equipment with moving parts and then swab it (contamination on equipment is often invisible until the equipment is moving)
- Sample high-risk equipment and areas.
- Sample large areas using sponge or cloth swabs.
- Sample equipment as it is being disassembled (cotton-tipped, medical swab sticks are good for sampling hard-to-reach places), carefully document where each sample was taken from.

For assistance, refer to the Food Authority's document Environmental sampling for *Listeria* management: [foodauthority.nsw.gov.au/ Documents/industry/environmental\\_sampling\\_for\\_Listeria.pdf](http://foodauthority.nsw.gov.au/Documents/industry/environmental_sampling_for_Listeria.pdf)

Is *Listeria* being spread around the production area? For example:

- when product is moved

- when people enter an area or move to a 'clean zone' When carried by water – either liquid or aerosols (bacteria are spread by high pressure cleaners)
- by equipment with moving parts.

## Positive pathogen detections

It is a legal requirement for licensed businesses to notify the Food Authority about positive pathogen detections. Notification should be given by phone within 24 hours of receiving the laboratory result, and in writing within seven days. Once the laboratory advises that a presumptive positive result has been recorded, there is usually a 24-hour delay before the result is conclusive.

Businesses should use this time to plan a product recall or withdrawal, in the event that a positive result is confirmed.

## More information

- Visit the Food Authority's website at [foodauthority.nsw.gov.au](http://foodauthority.nsw.gov.au)
- Phone the Food Authority's helpline on 1300 552 406

## NSW

- *Listeria* Management Program [foodauthority.nsw.gov.au/ Documents/industry/listeria\\_management\\_program.pdf](http://foodauthority.nsw.gov.au/Documents/industry/listeria_management_program.pdf)

## New Zealand

- Guidance for the control of *Listeria* in RTE foods [foodsafety.govt.nz/elibrary/industry/good-operating-practices.pdf](http://foodsafety.govt.nz/elibrary/industry/good-operating-practices.pdf)

## International

- Food Safety Authority of Ireland [fsai.ie/workarea/downloadasset.aspx?id=1234](http://fsai.ie/workarea/downloadasset.aspx?id=1234)
- Food Standards UK [food.gov.uk/sites/default/files/multimedia/pdfs/lrmp.pdf](http://food.gov.uk/sites/default/files/multimedia/pdfs/lrmp.pdf)
- North American Meat Institute [meatinstitute.org/index.php?ht=display/ArticleDetails/i/71693](http://meatinstitute.org/index.php?ht=display/ArticleDetails/i/71693)

## Australia and New Zealand

- FSANZ Food Industry Recall Protocol [foodstandards.gov.au/industry/foodrecalls/firp/pages/default.aspx](http://foodstandards.gov.au/industry/foodrecalls/firp/pages/default.aspx)

About the NSW Food Authority: The NSW Food Authority is the government organisation that helps ensure NSW food is safe and correctly labelled. It works with consumers, industry and other government organisations to minimise food poisoning by providing information about and regulating the safe production, storage, transport, promotion and preparation of food.

Note: This information is a general summary and cannot cover all situations. Food businesses are required to comply with all of the provisions of the Food Standards Code and the *Food Act 2003* (NSW).



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