

Food and Environmental Safety Tips for Pregnant Women



activities, and wash hands well with soap and water following litter box cleaning.

- * keep cats indoors and feed them dry or canned cat food (cats can become infected by eating or being fed raw or undercooked meat).
- * avoid bringing a new cat into your home that might have been an outdoor cat or might have been fed raw meat. Also, avoid handling stray cats and kittens. Your vet can answer other questions you may have regarding your cat and risk for toxoplasmosis.

- Wear gloves while gardening and while doing anything outdoors that involves handling soil.
- Have someone who is healthy and not pregnant handle raw meat for you. If this is not possible, wear clean latex gloves when you touch raw meats and wash all cutting boards, sinks, knives and other utensils that might have touched raw meat. Wash your hands well with soap and warm water afterwards.

•
Source: Centers for Disease Control (1999). *Fact Sheet: Toxoplasmosis*. Atlanta: Centers for Disease Control.

MERCURY CONTAMINATED FISH

Pregnant women and women of childbearing age who may become pregnant have been advised not to eat certain varieties of fish that may be contaminated with high levels of a form of mercury called methyl mercury. This form of mercury may harm an unborn baby's developing nervous system.

Canned Tuna

Health Canada provides the following advice:

- Women who are or who may become pregnant, or who are breastfeeding can eat up to four Food Guide Servings of canned albacore tuna each week. One Food Guide Serving is 75g, 2 ½ oz, 125 mL, or ½ cup.
- Children between one and four years old can eat up to one Food Guide Serving of albacore tuna each week.

- Children between five and eleven years old can eat up to two Food Guide Servings of albacore tuna each week.

It is important to note that canned albacore tuna is not the same as canned light tuna. Canned light tuna contains other species of tuna such as skipjack, yellowfin, and tongol, which are relatively low in mercury. Based on lower mercury levels, Health Canada does not consider it necessary to offer any consumption advice specific to canned light tuna.

Source: Health Canada (2007) *Health Canada advises specific groups to limit their consumption of canned albacore tuna*. Ottawa: Health Canada.

Other Potentially Contaminated Fish

The Canadian Food Inspection Agency has advised that that **shark, swordfish and fresh and frozen tuna** should only be consumed once per month by pregnant women, women of childbearing age, and young children.



Source: Canadian Food Inspection Agency (2002). *Food Safety Facts on Mercury and Fish Consumption*. Ottawa: Canadian Food Inspection Agency.

For more information, please contact your nearest Environmental Public Health Services office.

Edmonton Main Office	(780) 413-7928
Capital Health Centre - South Tower	(780) 735-1400
Strathcona	(780) 467-5571
Spruce Grove	(780) 962-7509
Leduc	(780) 980-4644
St. Albert	(780) 459-6671



During pregnancy, women are at increased risk of certain infections that are transmitted through food and/or the environment, which can negatively impact the health of a newborn. As well, certain foods contain contaminants at levels that do not pose a significant risk to an adult, but can impact the development of a growing fetus.

Capital Health offers the following food and environmental safety tips for pregnant women to help prevent exposure of your newborn to Listeria, Toxoplasmosis, and Methyl Mercury

LISTERIOSIS

Listeriosis is a blood infection caused by the bacterium *Listeria monocytogenes*. Those at highest risk of acquiring listeriosis are those with weakened immune systems (including pregnant women), who are up to 300 times more likely than other healthy adults to get listeriosis. Infection during pregnancy can increase the risk of premature delivery, infection of the newborn or even stillbirth.

Listeria bacteria are common in the environment, and sometimes contaminate food. Those who eat food contaminated with Listeria bacteria sometimes develop the infection.

How can you reduce your risk of listeriosis?

- Thoroughly cook raw food from animal sources, such as beef, pork and poultry.
- Wash raw vegetables thoroughly before eating.
- Keep uncooked meats separate from vegetables and from cooked foods and ready-to-eat foods.
- Avoid unpasteurized milk and foods made with unpasteurized milk.
- Wash hands, knives and cutting boards after handling raw foods.

The following are also recommended for pregnant women:

- Avoid soft cheeses such as feta, brie, camembert, blue-veined and Mexican-style cheese. (Hard cheeses, processed cheeses, cream cheeses, cottage cheeses and yogurt need not be avoided.)
- Leftover foods and ready-to-eat foods, such as hot dogs, should be cooked until steaming hot before eating.
- Although the risk of listeriosis associated with foods from deli counters is relatively low, pregnant women and immunosuppressed persons may choose to avoid these foods or thoroughly reheat cold cuts before eating.

How do you know if you have listeriosis?

There is no routine screening test for susceptibility to listeriosis during pregnancy, as there is for rubella and some other congenital infections. If you experience the following symptoms during pregnancy, consult your doctor:

- Fever
- Intense headache
- Nausea
- Tenderness or pain in the muscles
- Vomiting
- Diarrhea
- Neck Stiffness

During pregnancy, a blood test is the most reliable way to find out if your symptoms are due to listeriosis.

What should you do if you've eaten a food recalled because of *Listeria* contamination?

The risk of an individual developing listeriosis after consumption of contaminated food is very small. If you do not experience any of the above symptoms within 2 months of eating food possibly contaminated with Listeria, tests and treatment are not recommended. If these symptoms are experienced within two months of eating food possibly contaminated with Listeria, contact your physician and advise him or her of this exposure.

Source: Centers for Disease Control (2001). *Listeriosis - Frequently Asked Questions*. Atlanta: Centers for Disease Control.

TOXOPLASMOSIS

Toxoplasmosis is an infection caused by a single-celled parasite, called *Toxoplasma gondii*, that is common in the environment. In healthy individuals, symptoms are relatively mild, and include swollen lymph glands and/or muscle aches and pains that last for a few days to several weeks. However, those with weakened immune systems, and infants (whose immune system is not mature), may develop more serious toxoplasmosis infection. Such individuals may experience damage to the eye or brain, and infants who become infected before birth can be born with several serious mental or physical problems.

Who is at risk for severe toxoplasmosis?

- Babies born to mothers who are FIRST exposed to *Toxoplasma* up to 6 months before or during pregnancy are at risk for severe disease. However, many exposed infants have no symptoms at all.
- Persons with severely weakened immune systems are at greater risk for severe toxoplasmosis. In such cases, an infection that occurred any time during life can reactivate and cause the severe symptoms of toxoplasmosis such as damage to the eye or brain.

How can I prevent toxoplasmosis?

The following recommendations are provided for pregnant women and women who may become pregnant:

- Cats sometimes pass the parasite in their feces. Therefore, pregnant women should, if possible:
 - * have someone else, one who is healthy and not pregnant clean the cat litter box on a daily basis.
 - * if this is not possible, wear gloves during these cleaning

