

Good sanitation practices are a main ingredient in Listeria control. A sanitation program cannot operate efficiently without a proper cleaning and sanitizing schedule. This needs to be coordinated by professionals.



Plant personnel are equally, if not more, important to the sanitation process. For this reason, employees should be taught and reminded that they are potential carriers of Listeria - on their shoes, on their clothing and within their bodies. Up to 10 percent of asymptomatic people carry Listeria in their gastrointestinal tracts. There's no way to routinely test for the presence of the pathogen in employees, But companies can reduce the potential for product contamination by restricting sick workers from processing areas. To further prevent human-related product contamination, managers can insist employees who have visited other areas of the plant or gone outside use foot washes before returning to designated work areas. Some companies may choose to prohibit food production workers from going outdoors during breaks.

Overlooked measures

Conducting a thorough visual inspection to ensure no food residues remain should be done prior to sanitizing surfaces. If any residue is left on equipment, bacteria will remain under that residue and continue to grow.



The most common areas to find *Listeria* are drains, floors and refrigeration units. These areas are among those most overlooked in cleaning and sanitation procedures. Using low water pressure and lots of water on the floor is preferable to avoid recontamination of equipment. If equipment is sanitized first, particles and residue from the floor may re-soil the equipment.

One of the other areas where *Listeria* is found is in the cooler. Coolers are usually not cleaned on a daily basis. But they should be cleaned on a frequent basis to prevent contamination. Cross zone contamination can also be avoided by washing cart wheels on a regular basis. One of the modes of transporting *Listeria* throughout the plant is on cart wheels. At most plants, carts and other mobile equipment go through raw material areas, cooked areas and packaging areas. It's not difficult to place a sanitizing trough outside each zone. At the very least plant personnel should regularly sanitize cart wheels by spraying sanitizer onto them.

Listeria tends to flourish in hidden places. Manufacturers usually forget the areas that are above eye level. Because *Listeria* can become airborne one should periodically monitor air quality. Even compressed air may be a source of pathogen growth.

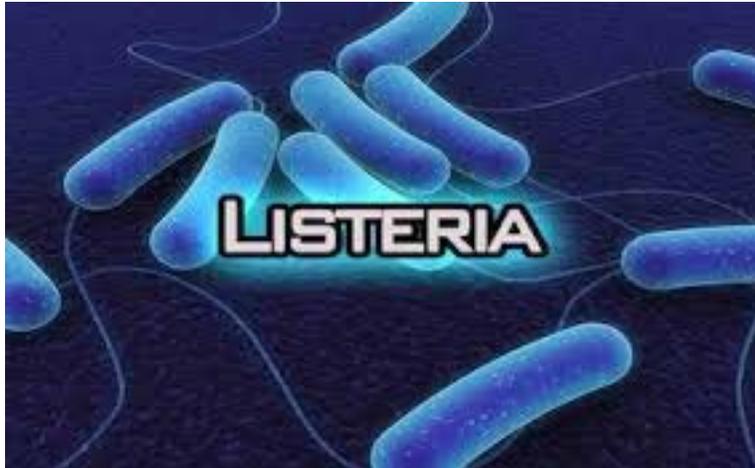
Detection protocols

One of the things we can do for day-to-day monitoring is a bioluminescence assay test. The test detects food residue. But it's not going to tell you if you have a *Listeria* problem. These tests

function only as a "heads up" warning system. Further identification is required if the test is positive.

More conclusive tests need to be conducted on a regular basis. Total plate counts for Listeria can be done . A prudent company in an area of high risk may do it once a week or more often.

Smaller companies should use an outside lab service. If you have a quality control person, he or she can be trained to take the samples and send them to the lab.



The bottom line: There are simple things you can do to eliminate Listeria. "But once you have a Listeria problem in your plant, getting rid of the pathogen is very difficult.

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