



# News Release

**For immediate release:** January 16, 2015

(15-014)

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## **Health officials investigate *Listeria* outbreak linked to Latin-style soft cheese**

*Pregnant women, newborns and adults with weakened immune systems most at risk*

**OLYMPIA** — State health and agriculture officials are working with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the U.S. Food and Drug Administration on an ongoing outbreak of *Listeria monocytogenes* infections linked to consumption of Latin-style soft cheese produced by Queseria Bendita, a Yakima, Washington firm.

As of January 16, 2015, a total of three cases have been identified from Washington in King, Pierce and Yakima counties. One illness was pregnancy-associated, two people were hospitalized and one death was reported. The affected products made by the Yakima-based Queseria Bendita are subject to a voluntary recall and the firm has stopped producing cheese.

Health officials are warning consumers who may have purchased these three Queseria Bendita brand cheeses: Queso Fresco, Panela, and Requeson and still have it in their refrigerators to throw the product away and not eat it. Grocery stores and distributors should pull and not sell these products.

Listeriosis is a serious infection caused by eating food contaminated with the bacterium *Listeria monocytogenes*. The disease affects primarily older adults, pregnant women, newborns, and persons with weakened immune systems. Approximately 11 to 29 cases of listeriosis are reported in Washington each year. Symptoms of listeriosis include fever, muscle aches, headache, stiff neck, confusion, loss of balance, and convulsions. Blood stream infections or meningitis may occur. Infected pregnant women may experience only a mild, flu-like illness; however, infections during pregnancy can lead to miscarriage or stillbirth, premature delivery, or infection of the newborn. Symptoms often begin 3 weeks after infection, but it could take anywhere from three to 70 days.

Anyone who believes they may have become ill with listeriosis should contact their health care provider.

There are some steps everyone can take to reduce the risk of acquiring a *Listeria* infection such as avoiding unpasteurized milk or foods made from unpasteurized milk (including cheese); washing raw fruits and vegetables thoroughly before eating; and thoroughly cooking raw food from animal sources, such as beef, pork, or poultry. You should keep uncooked meats separate from vegetables and cooked or ready-to-eat foods. Make sure to wash hands, knives, and cutting boards after handling uncooked foods. It is important to consume perishable and ready-to-eat foods as soon as possible.

More information on [Listeria](#) can be found on the [Department of Health website](#).

The [Department of Health website](#) ([www.doh.wa.gov](http://www.doh.wa.gov)) is your source for *a healthy dose of information*. Also, [find us on Facebook](#) and [follow us on Twitter](#).

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