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### **Listeriosis Alert for Health Care Providers**

In the preceding two weeks, two pregnant women from the south central Washington region have been diagnosed with listeriosis and have delivered severely affected infants. Investigation of whether the two cases are associated and pursuit of the possible common source of infection are ongoing by the Yakima Health District, Klickitat County Health Department, and Washington State Department of Health. At a minimum, the similar location and timing of the illnesses are suggestive of a possible association.

Listeriosis is caused by *Listeria monocytogenes*, a gram-positive bacillus that is most commonly associated with disease in pregnant women, neonates, and immunocompromised individuals. Clinical manifestations include chorioamnionitis and septic abortion or pre-term delivery in pregnant women and meningoencephalitis or sepsis in infants and immunocompromised individuals. Febrile gastroenteritis is occasionally observed in otherwise healthy non-pregnant individuals. Post-partum courses are usually uneventful for affected women, but mortality can approach or exceed 50% among affected infants and immunocompromised individuals.

Diagnosis is based upon clinical suspicion and isolation of the organism from affected fluids or tissues (e.g., blood, cerebrospinal fluid, meconium, placenta). The microbiology laboratory should be notified when listeriosis is suspected so that its isolation is specifically pursued and growth is not mistaken for saprophytic organisms (e.g., diphtheroids). Management includes administration of ampicillin and gentamycin and supportive care (usually intensive care for neonates and immunocompromised). Alternative treatment for penicillin-allergic patients includes trimethoprim-sulfamethoxazole. Cephalosporins are not effective against *L. monocytogenes*.

Listeriosis is most often acquired by ingestion of the following contaminated animal products: soft cheeses, unpasteurized milk and foods made from it, uncooked hot dogs, ready-to-eat delicatessen meats, and pates. The organism can multiply in contaminated foods even when held at refrigeration temperatures. Prevention focuses on basics of good food handling and avoidance of the aforementioned food products by pregnant women and immunocompromised individuals. Prior to consumption by high-risk individuals, any such foods must be heated until steaming hot. Hard cheese, processed cheese, cream cheese, cottage cheese, and yoghurt need not be avoided.

If you suspect listeriosis in a patient, please be sure to collect appropriate specimens for culture. If the diagnosis is confirmed, please ask the laboratory to save the isolate. Report confirmed cases to YHD on the same or next working day by calling (509) 249-6541. Thank you for your consideration of this matter.

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Health Officer