

LISTERIA

• What is listeria ?

■ Listeria are ubiquitous bacteria, which means that they can be found in almost any environment (soil, water, air). Consequently, if no precautions are taken, they can easily contaminate many foodstuffs : meat and meat prod-

ucts, fish, raw vegetables, dairy products, etc.

■ There are various strains of this bacterium, only one of which is dangerous for humans and animals : *Listeria monocytogenes*.

• Incidence on health

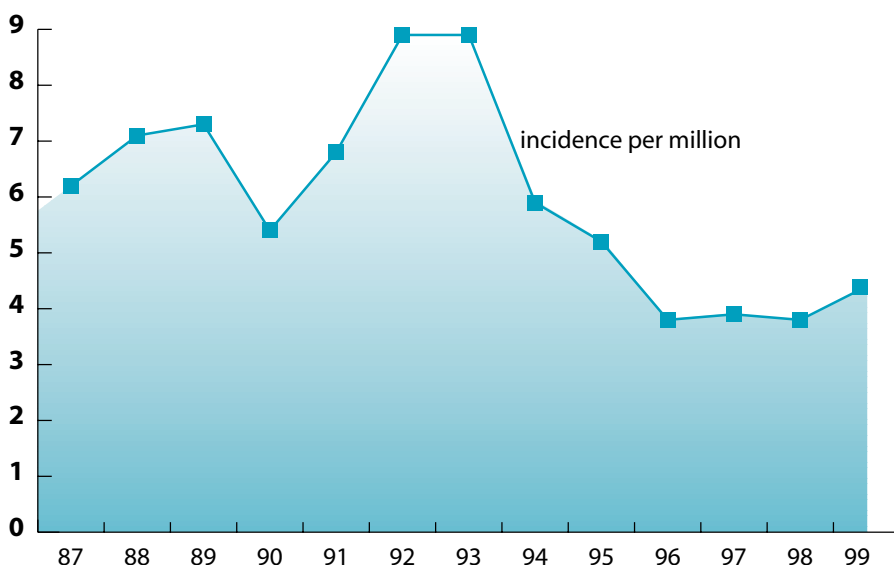
■ In humans, *Listeria monocytogenes* can cause listeriosis, a condition that is often trivial (the symptoms resemble those of a common flu) but which - if it is not diagnosed and treated rapidly with antibiotics - can produce serious complications. In immunosuppressed persons, listeriosis can develop into very severe forms (meningitis, septicaemia) that can be fatal.

During pregnancy and in the absence of early treatment, the infection can reach the foetus and cause abortion or severe neonatal pathologies. In France, human listeriosis has been classified as a disease with compulsory declaration since 1998. The national Listeria reference centre for France is established at the Pasteur Institute in Paris.

■ In France, the incidence of human listeriosis is low, with less than 4 cases per million inhabitants and per year. Since 1993, a significant fall in the number of cases has been observed, particularly of the maternal and neonatal forms of the condition (20 % of the cases in 1998 against 50 % in 1987) thanks to the information given to pregnant women and thanks to greater awareness in the medical profession.

■ In 1998, 230 cases were reported, which - despite increased surveillance - amounts to only a third of the incidence observed in the past ten years.

France : Incidence of listeriosis of all origins. in cases per million



● Regulations : thresholds

■ As a general rule, hygiene and sanitary regulations require the absence of any pathogenic germ in foodstuffs for human consumption.

■ For dairy products, sanitary regulations are particularly precise with

respect to *Listeria monocytogenes*: the Community Directive 92/46 of 16 June 1992 requires the absence of *Listeria monocytogenes* in 25 grams of cheese, or even in 1 gram (hard cheese, other dairy products) at the manufacturing stage.

For distribution, an opinion of CSHPF (French High Council for Public Hygiene) fixes the criterion of 100 *Listeria* per gram as the maximum admissible threshold for consumption, a threshold that applies to all foodstuffs.

● Facts and figures

■ In 1999, the SVDs took 15 059 samples in order to detect *Listeria* in dairy processing plants in the framework of their routine controls. In addition, DGAL implemented specific surveillance pro-

grammes. In 1997, the latest surveillance programme, 834 samples (consisting each of 5 units of at least 100 grams of cheese from the same manufacturing batch ready to be placed on the market) were

taken from various manufacturing plants or ripening cellars. Control frequency is variable and is reinforced in case of a problem. The analysis of the samples follows an official pre-established method.

● Comparison

Incidence of listeriosis of all origins

France	USA	Australia
3,8	6	3

in cases/million 1998

● Abbreviations

- ATLA** : French Dairy Processors' Association
CNIEL : National Interprofessional Centre of the Dairy Economy
CSHP : French High Council for Public Hygiene
DGAL : General Directorate for Food
DGCCRF : General Directorate for Competition, Consumption and the Repression of Fraud
DSV : Director of Veterinary Services
SVD : Departmental Veterinary Service
WHO : World Health Organisation

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