

DELI MEAT

Medium Risk

Whether piled high on sandwiches or displayed on a party platter, deli meat is a favorite of American consumers. Often referred to as “cold cuts,” these meats are pre-cooked and may be pre-packaged or sliced-to-order at a grocer’s deli counter. At the counter, deli meats are the most popular item—beating out cheeses, deli salads, and prepared meals. Unfortunately, this convenient food can be contaminated with bacteria, such as *Listeria*, or viruses that can make you sick. Some bacteria can survive and grow even in the refrigerator and on surfaces, even plastic and metal. Pregnant women should be especially careful when eating deli meat, since *Listeria* can cause miscarriage. Use the tips below to avoid contamination and illness.

Food Preparation

- Always wash your hands thoroughly with warm water and soap for at least 20 seconds before and during food preparation.
- If your immune system is weak (whether from pregnancy, age, or a medical condition) you should generally avoid deli meats. If you do eat deli meat, purchase pre-packaged deli meat, because it is less-likely to be contaminated with bacteria than sliced-to-order deli meat (from the deli counter).

- Although deli meat is already cooked, *Listeria* can get onto the meat and even grow in the refrigerator. To ensure a safer product, heat deli meats in the microwave until steaming. Before eating, you can chill them in a clean container in the refrigerator.
- Keep deli meat in the fridge (40 degrees or below). Beware of sandwich counters where deli meat sits at room temperature for long periods of time—refrigeration is key to keep most bacteria from growing.
- You should eat or throw away deli meat within three days of opening (if pre-packaged) or buying (if sliced-to-order).

Bacteria don’t know whether they are at a 5-star restaurant, expensive grocery store, or on a local farm—so practice “defensive eating” every time, no matter where you get your food, to protect yourself and your family.



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