



Testing product for *Listeria monocytogenes*

You need to produce safe and suitable food so people don't get sick. Testing your ready-to-eat (RTE) product helps to confirm that the food control measures in place are effective.

RMP Requirement

What is needed?

-  A written product sampling programme of when, what and how many samples to take.
-  A contract with an ISO/IEC17025 accredited laboratory.
-  Trained samplers who know how to take samples properly.
-  Samples collected according to the programme and sent to the laboratory for testing. A record is kept of the samples sent.
-  Instructions on reviewing the laboratory results.
-  If *Listeria monocytogenes* is found you must take corrective actions.

See factsheets 6 and 7 for further guidance.



Regulatory criteria (limits) that apply to RTE foods

The microbiological limits for *Listeria monocytogenes* in the Food Standards Code Standard 1.6.1, Schedule 27 are:

- For RTE foods in which growth of *Listeria monocytogenes* can occur, **no detection**.
- For RTE foods in which growth of *Listeria monocytogenes* will not occur, **less than 100 cfu/g**.

How often should I test?

- You need to test often enough to give confidence in your products and process.
- Frequency can be set by an operator, based on:
 - the type of process
 - the level of production
 - the number of different products
 - the history of performance
 - the intended consumer – products intended to be consumed by vulnerable populations may need more testing.
- As a guide, no less than testing every 10th batch. This can be less frequent if results are consistently satisfactory.
- If you have a new product or are using new processing equipment make sure that this product is tested.

What tests can the laboratory do for you?

- Presence or Absence
- Detected or Not detected
- *Listeria spp* or *Listeria monocytogenes*
- Count (enumeration) – tests how many *Listeria* there are, i.e. count per gram of food (cfu/g)

Looking for more information?

Check out the MPI *Listeria* factsheets and guides by searching "Listeria" on the MPI website:

www.mpi.govt.nz. Contact MPI: info@mpi.govt.nz or 0800 00 83 33

Sending product for testing

- **How many samples?** To show compliance with the Food Standards Code Standard 1.6.1, five units or samples need to be tested from a batch. The more samples tested, the more meaningful the results.
- **What is a sample?** If practicable, send unopened consumer packs of product for testing. If consumer packs are too large or not appropriate, take a sample of product (at least 100g). Talk to your laboratory about the best way to do this.



How to take an aseptic sample

(Guidance for taking samples from large products)

-  Wash and dry hands. Place product on a sanitised surface (bench or board).
-  Wipe knives and tongs with alcohol wipes. Carefully cut off or pick up the sample.
-  Place in a new sterile plastic container.
-  Seal and label with sample details.
-  Store samples in a cool place, e.g. fridge, chilly bin.
-  Send to laboratory within agreed time, e.g. 24 hours, (with samples as close to refrigeration temperatures as possible).

Laboratory results



Record all results in a way that allows you to easily identify trends (e.g. spreadsheet, diagrams, labels on floor plan).



If *Listeria monocytogenes* is present and the count exceeds regulatory limits, you must take immediate action.

▶ **Review your *Listeria* controls. Which controls are not working effectively? See factsheets 6 and 7 for further guidance.**

Remember

- *Listeria* in product is:
 - not evenly spread throughout a product
 - typically sporadic (occurs now and then)
 - often present in low numbers.
- Finding no positives does not necessarily mean that the whole batch of product is free of *Listeria monocytogenes*.

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