

# Cantaloupes, Listeriosis, and You

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At the end of Summer 2011, an outbreak of Listeriosis began due to consumption of Rocky Ford brand cantaloupes from Jensen Farms, Colorado. As of November 2, 2011, there have been 139 confirmed infections and 29 deaths. One pregnant woman fell ill and resulted in a miscarriage. Cantaloupes from other farms *are safe* to eat. If the source of where a cantaloupe is from is unknown, or any other produce for that matter, ask a grocery store representative or produce attendant. If the source is unknown, the best option is to avoid purchase. If cantaloupes have already been purchased and the source is unknown – “When in doubt, throw it out.” Currently the outbreak has affected individuals in 28 different states, but not including Florida. Whether it is in our area or not, it is still pertinent to be on the guard in preventing food-borne illnesses.

## What is it?

Listeriosis is a bacterial infection caused by the germ *Listeria monocytogenes*. The disease primarily affects older adults, pregnant women, newborns, and immunocompromised adults. It is normally rare for a regular, healthy individual to succumb to the disease. Typical symptoms of Listeriosis include fever and muscle aches. This is sometimes preceded by diarrhea or other gastrointestinal symptoms.

## How do I prevent it?

Prevention methods of listeriosis are recommended by the FDA and can be applied for prevention of other food-borne illnesses such as *Salmonella*. They are as follows –

- **Rinse** raw produce, such as fruits and vegetables, thoroughly under running tap water before eating cutting or cooking. Even if the produce will be peeled, it should still be washed first.
- **Scrub** firm produce, such as melons and cucumbers, with a clean produce brush.
- **Dry** the produce with a clean cloth or paper towel.
- **Separate** uncooked meats and poultry from vegetables, cooked foods, and ready-to-eat foods.



Some general rules of thumb:

- Keep your kitchen and environment cleaner and safer.
- Cook meat and poultry thoroughly.
- Store foods safely.
- Choose safer foods.