

Food safety criteria for *Listeria monocytogenes* in ready-to-eat food

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Food safety criteria for *Listeria monocytogenes* in ready-to-eat food will apply throughout the food chain

[Draft](#) Commission Regulation amending Regulation (EC) No 2073/2005 as regards *Listeria monocytogenes* [download]

Update

The EU proposes that its food safety microbiological criteria for *Listeria monocytogenes* in ready-to-eat food should apply from the production stage, through distribution, to the end of its shelf-life. If a food business operator cannot demonstrate to the competent authority that the level of *L. monocytogenes* in a food product will never be higher than 100 colony-forming units per gram (cfu/g), they must be able to show that the pathogen is completely absent in a 25 g portion of that food during its whole shelf-life. Feedback on the European Commission's proposal can be given via the EU's "[Have Your Say](#)" webpage until **8 May 2024**.

Impacted products

Ready-to-eat foods

What is changing?

The EU proposes to reinforce requirements to keep *L. monocytogenes* under 100 cfu/g in ready-to-eat food throughout its shelf-life. Requirements already in place at the production stage will also apply at all other stages in the food chain, after food has left the production site for distribution.

- Food business operators should be able to demonstrate to the competent authority that the level of *L. monocytogenes* in a food product will never be higher than 100 cfu/g throughout the shelf-life of the food. This 100 cfu/g limit does not apply to foods for infants and consumers with weakened immune defences, who must not be exposed to any concentration of this pathogen.

- If it is not possible to demonstrate the above, operators must show that the pathogen is completely absent in a 25 g portion of that food during its whole shelf-life.

Why?

The number of cases of listeriosis in humans in the EU was 15.9% higher in 2022 than in 2021 ([EFSA and ECDC 2023](#)). In 2022, annual deaths from foodborne outbreaks of *L. monocytogenes* in the EU were among the highest reported over the past 10 years. In view of this upsurge, it is crucial that the food safety criteria for *L. monocytogenes* are tightened to offer a consistently high level of consumer protection throughout the shelf-life of ready-to-eat foods.

Timeline

Feedback on the draft can be submitted until **8 May 2024**.

Expected date of application: 1 January 2026.

What are the major implications for exporting countries?

Companies that export ready-to-eat foods to the EU must be able to demonstrate that foods in which *L. monocytogenes* can grow will not exceed the 100 cfu/g limit for this pathogen throughout the product's shelf-life, or if that is not possible, that the pathogen is completely absent in a 25 g portion of the product during its whole shelf-life.

These requirements could be particularly challenging for foods that are not cooked or reheated before serving (salads, sprouts, cheese, cooked meats, smoked fish, desserts, etc.).

Recommended Actions

Producers of ready-to-eat foods for export to the EU should assess their current practices for *L. monocytogenes* control, and any potential challenges posed by the proposed Regulation, particularly for foods that are not cooked or reheated before serving such as salads, sprouts, cheese, cooked meats, smoked fish, or desserts.

There is an opportunity to provide feedback on the European Commission's proposal via the EU's "[Have Your Say](#)" webpage until **8 May 2024**.

Background

Under the umbrella of the EU's General Food Law (Regulation [178/2002](#)), Regulation [852/2004](#) lays down general rules for food business operators on the hygiene of all foods. It is necessary to ensure food safety throughout the food chain. Primary responsibility for food safety rests with the food business operator.

Regulation [2073/2005](#) lays down food safety criteria for products placed on the European market. It lays down the microbiological criteria for foodborne pathogens, including *L. monocytogenes*, that pose a serious risk to public health.

These Regulations are mentioned in the public health attestation that non-EU country authorities must sign to guarantee that only food produced in compliance with the EU legislation is exported to the EU.

Food containing a concentration of *L. monocytogenes* over the limit of 100 cfu/g is potentially injurious to health.

The 100 cfu/g limit **does not apply to food for infants and consumers with weakened immune defences**, who must not be exposed to any concentration of this pathogen.

Resources

EFSA and ECDC (2023) [The European Union One Health 2022 Zoonoses Report](#). EFSA Journal, 21(12): e8442. European Food Safety Authority and European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control.

Commission Regulation (EC) No [2073/2005](#) on microbiological criteria for foodstuffs

Regulation (EC) No [852/2004](#) on the hygiene of foodstuffs

Sources

[Draft](#) Commission Regulation amending Regulation (EC) No 2073/2005 as regards *Listeria monocytogenes* [download]

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