

FSA and UKHSA warn of listeria risk with Baronet soft cheeses

The FSA and UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) are warning the public not to eat Baronet semi soft cheeses which have been [recalled because they are contaminated with listeria](#), in some cheeses at exceptionally high levels.

Baronet is a pasteurised semi soft cheese with a pinkish orange rind and a pungent smell. It is sold in both small individual rounds and as 1kg wheels which may be cut down to order.

The cheeses are sometimes served sliced from a deli counter, so it may not always be clear whether you have purchased an affected product. If in doubt, consumers are advised to contact the retailer they bought their cheese from to find out if the Baronet cheese they have purchased is from the businesses and batches affected and in the meantime to not eat the product.

Whole Genome Sequencing surveillance of listeriosis samples by UKHSA has identified three cases potentially linked to an outbreak. Sadly, one person has died.

The outbreak strain has also been found in some food products and samples taken from food environments, however there is no confirmation that Baronet is the cause of this outbreak.

Symptoms caused by listeriosis can be similar to flu and include high temperature, muscle ache or pain, chills, feeling or being sick and diarrhoea. However, in rare cases, the infection can be more severe, causing serious complications, such as meningitis.

People more vulnerable to listeria infections – including those over 65 years of age, pregnant women and their unborn babies, babies less than one month old and people with weakened immune systems (such as those with cancer, HIV, underlying liver or kidney disease or people undergoing immunosuppressive treatment) should take particular care.

If you have purchased any recalled products, it is important that you:

- Do not eat the product
- Thoroughly clean any surfaces they may have touched to prevent cross-contamination of other foods and items used to consume food and drink
- Make sure that fridges are kept at the right temperature - Five Degrees Celsius or below - as this will limit the growth of any harmful bacteria
- Always use products up to and within their use-by date, following storage instructions on the label

FSA Head of Incidents, Tina Potter, said:

“Due to this outbreak of *Listeria monocytogenes*, we are urging consumers who are vulnerable to *Listeria* infection – including people who are pregnant and people with weakened immune systems to ensure they follow the advice in the product recall notices, which details all of the products which may pose a risk.

“We are also asking people to make sure that elderly relatives who may have purchased the recalled items, and who are at particular risk, are aware of the recall and observe the advice.

“Some foods carry a greater risk of listeria than others. These include soft cheeses, pate, smoked fish, chilled sliced meats and other chilled ready to eat products.”

Richard Elson, Head of Incidents and response at UKHSA, said:

“Listeriosis is a rare infection and most people will only experience mild symptoms such as abdominal pain or diarrhoea, which usually pass within a few days without the need for treatment. But people with weakened immune systems, who are pregnant, or are infants or elderly are at greater risk of developing severe symptoms.

“If you are in a group who are at higher risk of severe symptoms, there is information on the NHS website about what foods to avoid and what to do if you think you have listeriosis.”

Anyone who does fall ill with symptoms of listeriosis is advised to follow [advice on the NHS.uk website](#) and to report their illness to their local authority.

Businesses are also being advised that they must check whether they have been impacted by the product withdrawal and recalls undertaken by the businesses and ensure they observe this and take action where necessary. If suppliers have sold onto retailers, it is vital that each retailer carries out a product recall and informs their local authority.

It is important that businesses follow the product withdrawal and recalls undertaken, and if they have received the product, ensure good hygiene practice to prevent the risk of cross-contamination – it is possible that other cheese, if handled using the same equipment or on common surfaces, may have also been contaminated and therefore affected.

The FSA and UKHSA continue to work closely together and with local authorities in response to this outbreak and further recalls may be undertaken if any more products are found to be affected.

For journalists wishing to get more information on this story, please contact the FSA Press Office on 020 7276 8888.