



Downs and Ups

A CHEESE EXPERT WEIGHS IN ON LISTERIA RISKS AND WHICH CHEESES ARE BEST FOR BIG PARTIES

Q: What is listeria? Am I at risk?

A: *Listeria* comprise a large group, or genus, of bacteria found in the environment—particularly in soil, animal bedding, and other wet areas on farms. Although most members are harmless, one species in particular, *Listeria monocytogenes*, can be deadly. An infection with this culprit is called listeriosis. As with most infectious illnesses, people with an overworked or underperforming immune system are at much greater risk: pregnant women, unborn children, the elderly, or anyone fighting other illness.

Preventing listeria contamination requires work all along the chain. For farmers that means proper dairy sanitation, maintaining a healthy herd of animals, and immaculate milk collection. For cheesemakers, thorough cleaning, packaging, and storage practices must also be strictly followed. While the risk exists regardless of whether milk is raw or pasteurized, some cheese styles are generally considered more susceptible—specifically bloomy-rind and soft, surface-ripened wheels. In both of these types, pH changes during ripening from a relatively safe, listeria-hostile level to one in which the pathogen can grow easily. Therefore consumers in the high-risk category mentioned earlier are cautioned against consumption.

For more information on listeria and food safety, visit culturecheesemag.com/listeria.

Q: I want to serve cheese at a party but don't know many of the people invited. What are some safe bets?

A: Start with cheeses that *you* are passionate about. You'll be more likely to spark conversation about the story behind favorite, familiar cheeses when the party gets started. This will help guests decide what sounds interesting—and you may find that your passion rubs off on them, too!

If you're new to the world of fromage, seek advice from a cheesemonger. A good monger should be able to offer information about products in the case; jot it all down to share with guests. In fact, some of the best cheese shops are known for colorful descriptions of their wares.

If a monger is not an option, try a few easy-to-find crowd pleasers: Cypress Grove Humboldt Fog, a creamy, herbaceous goat cheese; Beecher's Handmade Cheese Flagship, a hearty bandage-wrapped cheddar style; Ossau-Iraty from French Basque Country, a nutty, easy-to-love sheep's milk wheel; and Oregon Blue from Rogue Creamery, a sweet, mellow standout for its approachability. **C**

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Humboldt Fog



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