

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

August 14, 2024

Mr. Paul Kiecker
Administrator
Food Safety and Inspection Service
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue SW
Washington, D.C. 20250

Ms. Mandy Cohen, M.D., M.P.H.
Director
Center for Disease Control & Prevention
Department of Health and Human Services
295 E. Street, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20024

Dear Administrator Paul Kiecker and Director Mandy Cohen,

As you know, listeriosis is a serious infection usually caused by eating food contaminated with the bacterium *Listeria monocytogenes*. An estimated 1,600 people get listeriosis each year, and about 260 people die from the infection. *Listeria monocytogenes* is most likely to sicken pregnant women and their newborns, adults aged 65 or older, and people with weakened immune systems.¹ *Listeria monocytogenes* can contaminate a wide range of foods during harvesting, processing, preparation, packing, transportation, or storage.

On July 26, 2024, the Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) announced that a Boar's Head Provisions Co. (Boar's Head) establishment in Jarratt, Virginia issued a recall of all its liverwurst products because it may be adulterated with *Listeria monocytogenes*, as well as additional deli meat products that were produced on the same line and on the same day as the liverwurst, amounting to approximately 207,528 pounds of products.² Several days later, on July 30, the Boar's Head establishment expanded its initial recall of deli meat products after whole-genome sequencing results revealed that a liverwurst sample collected by the Maryland Department of Health tested positive for the outbreak strain of *Listeria monocytogene*.³ New York State Food Laboratory also identified the same outbreak strain of *Listeria monocytogenes* from a sample of unopened Boar's Head liverwurst products collected from retail stores. The expanded recall now includes up to 7 million additional pounds of ready-to-eat meat and poultry products.

Illness, hospitalization, and deaths linked to the *Listeria monocytogenes* outbreak have increased since that time. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), as of August 8, reported illness linked to the listeria outbreak have increased to 43 cases, hospitalizations have increased to 43 cases, and the deaths have increased to 3 cases across 13 states.⁴ The CDC notes that the true number of sick people is likely higher as all the documented ill patients were hospitalized, and that some people may recover without medical care.

For members of Congress to adequately inform their constituents on what is needed to address the *Listeria monocytogenes* outbreak, we request that you respond to the following questions:

¹ CDC, *Listeria (Listeriosis)*, (9 August 2024). <https://www.cdc.gov/listeria/index.html>

² FSIS, *Boar's Head Provisions Co. Recalls Ready-To-Eat Liverwurst And Other Deli Meat Products Due to Possible Listeria Contamination*, (26 July 2024). <https://www.fsis.usda.gov/recalls-alerts/boars-head-provisions-co--recalls-ready-eat-liverwurst-and-other-deli-meat-products>

³ FSIS, *Boar's Head Provisions Co. Expands Recall for Ready-To-Eat Meat and Poultry Products Due to Possible Listeria Contamination*, (30 July 2024). <https://www.fsis.usda.gov/recalls-alerts/boars-head-provisions-co--expands-recall-ready-eat-meat-and-poultry-products-due>

⁴ CDC, *Listeria (Listeriosis), Investigative Details*. (8 August 2024). <https://www.cdc.gov/listeria/outbreaks/delimeats-7-24/details.html>

1. Reports indicate that FSIS is working with the CDC and state public health partners to investigate the multistate outbreak of *Listeria monocytogenes* infections. The New York State Department of Health reports 14 cases, including two in Suffolk County and one in Nassau County. What steps has FSIS taken to deploy inspectors and investigators to hotspots like Suffolk County and Nassau County?
2. Studies demonstrate that deli products sliced in retail shops often have a higher level of bacterial contamination than products prepared in deli meat factories. Approximately 83% of listeriosis cases caused by deli meats were associated with products sliced at retail.⁵ What steps has FSIS taken to update its Retail *Listeria Monocytogenes* Guidelines and work with public health partners and industry groups to improve its outreach since the current outbreak?
3. As noted above, the CDC says that the true number of sick people is likely higher and that some people may not receive medical care. What steps has the CDC taken to increase public awareness of the signs and symptoms of listeria during the current outbreak?

Sincerely,



Andrew R. Garbarino
Member of Congress



Nick LaLota
Member of Congress



Anthony D'Esposito
Member of Congress



Thomas R. Suozzi
Member of Congress

⁵ NIH, *Ready-to-eat Meat Products As a Source of Listeria Monocytogenes*, (30 March 2018).
<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5957461/>