Yakima-made cheese products linked to illnesses: consumers shouldn't eat it

Local News

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OLYMPIA — State health officials are warning against eating soft Mexican cheese products made by a Yakima company after a Washington resident was confirmed with listeriosis. The affected products made by the Yakima-based Queseria Bendita are subject to a voluntary recall.

Health officials linked the illness of a pregnant woman in King County to cheese products contaminated with *Listeria*. Samples taken from stores and from the plant confirmed the bacteria. The woman was ill in January and has since recovered. The baby was delivered without complications; however, the disease caused by *Listeria monocytogenes* can be very serious.

Healthy people infected with *Listeria* may have diarrhea or flu-like illness — fever, headache, muscle aches. It can result in bloodstream infection or meningitis. People with weak immune systems or other health conditions are at higher risk. Women who are infected during pregnancy may pass it to their babies. This can result in early delivery or stillbirth. Pregnant women and their newborns are 20 times more likely than healthy adults to get a *Listeria* infection.

Queseria Bendita has announced the recall of three different types of cheeses (www.fda.gov/Safety/Recalls/ucm201350.htm) – Queso Fresco, Panela, and Requeson. These products are sold in stores, and also supplied to many restaurants in the Pacific Northwest (www.oregon.gov/DHS/news/2010news/2010-0219a.pdf).. Health officials urge anyone who has these products not to eat them (www.doh.wa.gov/Publicat/2010_news/QuesBendList-sp.pdf).

Listeriosis (www.doh.wa.gov/ehsphl/factsheet/listeriosis.htm) is mostly a foodborne infection caused by *Listeria* bacteria. *Listeria* is often found in soft cheeses, including feta, Brie, Camembert, Roquefort, bleu, and Mexican–style cheeses. It’s commonly found in raw milk and other ready-to-eat foods — smoked fish, vegetables, salads, and items purchased at store delis. The bacteria may also be found in hot dogs and other processed meats.

There are some steps everyone can take to reduce the risk of acquiring a *Listeria* infection:

- Avoid unpasteurized milk or foods made from unpasteurized milk (including cheese).
- Wash raw vegetables thoroughly before eating.
- Thoroughly cook raw food from animal sources, such as beef, pork, or poultry.
- Keep uncooked meats separate from vegetables and cooked or ready-to-eat foods.
- Wash hands, knives, and cutting boards after handling uncooked foods.
- Consume perishable and ready-to-eat foods as soon as possible.

The Department of Health recommends people avoid eating certain foods and practice safe food handling. Information on food safety (www.doh.wa.gov/ehp/food/safetytips.html) is on the state health department’s Web site. Online, there are several other tips on how to avoid listeriosis (www.kingcounty.gov/healthservi ... diseases/listeriosis.aspx).