

Preventing Listeriosis

In Pregnant Hispanic Women in the U.S.



*Community Educator's Guide
To A Serious Foodborne Risk*

In English and Spanish (turn over for Spanish)



About This Program

Dear Community Educator,

We need your help. You can play a **critical role** in preventing the **listeriosis** disease in your community. This foodborne illness is caused by *Listeria* bacteria, and eating foods that contain this bacteria can lead to serious illness – and even death. The youngest victim of listeriosis is the **unborn baby** – who can become infected even though the mother doesn't feel sick! The message for pregnant women is simple: *never* eat dairy products made with unpasteurized milk. Pregnant women should only eat cheese that is labeled “made from pasteurized milk” and purchased in stores.

Pregnant Hispanic women in the U.S. are at critical risk for becoming infected by Listeria.

YOU can help keep these women and their babies safe!

- All **pregnant women are at serious risk** for listeriosis – in fact, they are *20 times more likely* to become infected than other healthy adults. That's because their immune systems are suppressed during pregnancy, so they are less able to fight off the infection.
- **Hispanic pregnant women** are *at even greater risk* of listeriosis because of traditional dietary habits.
- If a pregnant woman has listeriosis, her **unborn baby can become ill – and even die.**

Statistics Tell The Story

- Recent serious listeriosis outbreaks were reported in California, Washington and North Carolina, where 12 cases of infected individuals – all Hispanic – were linked to eating **contaminated, homemade Queso Fresco**¹.
- In the most recent listeriosis outbreak, eleven victims were non-English speaking women and ten were pregnant. The infections resulted in **five stillbirths, three premature deliveries, and two infected newborns**.

¹ U.S. Food and Drug Administration

The risk to Hispanic women is much higher than it is for the general population because of the cultural tradition of eating Mexican-style soft cheeses like Queso Fresco, which, in many Latin American countries, are often made from “raw” (unpasteurized) milk. **Most women are simply unaware that cheese made with unpasteurized milk can harbor these deadly bacteria!**

That's why this **Preventing Listeriosis Community Educator's Guide** was created. It will make it easier for you to spread this important health message throughout your community. The guide includes a variety of handouts and tools to be reproduced and distributed – along with background information for you regarding the disease, its symptoms, and how to prevent it.

Thank you for alerting women in your community about this potentially fatal condition. Pregnant women need to know that they could be putting their unborn babies at risk.

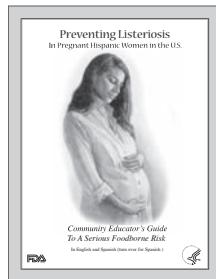
Sincerely yours,

Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition
Food and Drug Administration

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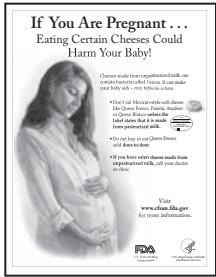
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Using This Toolkit



Community Educator's Guide

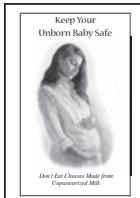
- This self-contained manual includes background information, common questions and answers, and a set of reproducible materials to help you notify your community about this critical health risk
- The reproducibles may be used in a variety of settings, including:
 - Group presentations
 - Home visits
 - Displays at community gathering points (see **Getting Started** on page 4 for location ideas)



Poster — 17 x 22", full color

- This Call-to-Action is a great springboard for alerting pregnant women about the health risk of Listeriosis
- If possible, place copies of the Consumer Brochure, Fotonovela or Community Flyer near the poster so the community can easily get more information on the topic

Handout Materials (reproducibles):



Consumer Brochure

A folding handout that gives the basic facts about Listeriosis: what it is, how to avoid it, and what to do if you think you're infected.



Community Flyer

This detailed one-page flyer can be used at community health fairs, posted on clinic walls, and placed in local OB/GYNs' waiting rooms.



Fotonovela — *Maribel's Story*

Everyone loves fotonovelas, and this 8-page story is designed to capture the attention of your audiences through a compelling, beautifully-illustrated story. Add your local contact information to the inside front cover.



Q&A – Questions from Pregnant Women

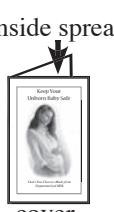
You may also photocopy this section and distribute it as a handout during your presentations or home visits.

Assembling Your Handout Materials

Consumer Brochure:

Pages 10 - 11

This reproducible is printed on two 8 1/2 x 11" pages.

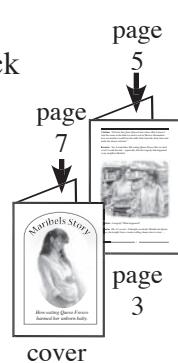
- Photocopy the pages back-to-back and top-to-top. 
- Fold in half. Finished brochures will be 5 1/2 x 8 1/2

Fotonovela:

Pages 12 – 15

This reproducible is printed on four 8 1/2 x 11" pages.

- Photocopy pages back-to-back and top-to-top.
- Place sheets in order.
- Fold pages in half to make the booklet. Finished fotonovelas will be 8 pages long, sized at 5 1/2 x 8 1/2.



Community Flyer:

Page 16

This reproducible is printed on one 8 1/2 x 11" page.

Photocopy the flyer – no folding required.

You may choose to photocopy English on one side and Spanish on the reverse for use with bi-lingual audiences.

Getting Started

Get Your Community Involved!

Use local organizations or groups to help you get the word out. Drop off copies of the materials at:

- Churches
- Clinics
- Community Based Organizations
- Pharmacies
- Local Mercados
- WIC Centers
- La Leche League offices
- School nurse offices
- Head Start and Early Head Start Centers

Speak out in the community

Vendors and local suppliers must understand the danger of selling soft cheeses made with unpasteurized milk. If made with unpasteurized milk, the Queso Fresco-style cheeses they are providing to their community may be endangering the life of an unborn child.

Be Prepared for Some Doubt

It's common for any of us to be unsure about this new *Listeria* information. After all, if someone has never heard of this risk before – or it never happened to anyone they knew back home, where eating cheese made with unpasteurized milk was even more common – it's human nature to conclude that the risk is not real.

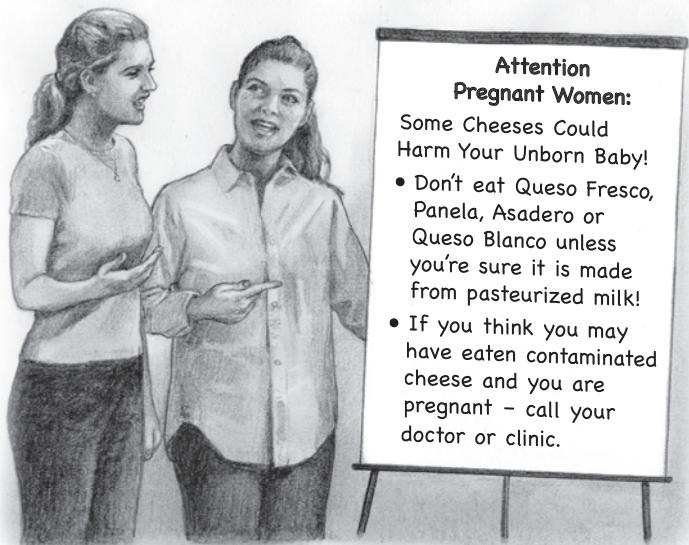
Remind them of these points:

- The risk is real – and could be deadly. It's very possible that it has happened to someone they know and that *Listeria* just wasn't diagnosed as the cause.
- Ever since the U.S. government became aware of this risk, they have been closely tracking outbreaks of listeriosis and the causes. The FDA and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) are making doctors more aware of the risks from listeriosis. You may start hearing more about this from your doctor or clinic.

Presentation Starter Ideas

Here are some ideas for getting the conversation going when speaking with a group. Note: When visiting a home and speaking one-on-one, the Fotonovela makes an ideal introduction to the topic.

- **Say “Cheese”:** Pick up several varieties of Queso Fresco-style cheeses to show to the group. In addition to store-bought brands that are labeled as “made from pasteurized milk,” try to locate a home-made variety without the proper labeling. Use these to open the discussion about types of traditional cheese and the importance of pasteurization and proper labeling.
- **Make it Personal:** Generate a discussion about how cheese was made in Latin American countries and how it's made in the U.S. Explain why eating cheese made with unpasteurized milk is so dangerous. Get participants to relay stories about vendors, people they know, and their own experiences.
- **Share Statistics:** Check with local public health authorities, hospitals or community clinics to see if there are any local statistics regarding listeriosis among pregnant women. Use these statistics to underscore the reality of the threat.



Q&A

Common Questions and Answers From Pregnant Women About Listeriosis

Q. What is listeriosis?

A. *It's a serious illness caused by eating food contaminated with Listeria bacteria. These germs can affect you and your unborn baby, newborns, and other people with immune systems weakened by cancer, diabetes and other diseases.*

Q. How can I get listeriosis?

A. *By eating foods that are contaminated with Listeria monocytogenes. These dangerous bacteria have been found in Queso Fresco-style soft cheeses and other foods made from unpasteurized milk.*

Q. Why am I at risk during pregnancy?

A. *During pregnancy, parts of your immune system are suppressed. That's why pregnant women are 20 times more likely than other healthy adults to get listeriosis. Approximately one third of all cases occur in pregnant women; also at high risk are newborns and fetuses.*

Q. I'm Latina. Am I at greater risk for listeriosis?

A. *From a biological standpoint, no. Latinas are not more susceptible to listeriosis. But from a dietary standpoint, Latinas have a higher chance of getting listeriosis than a non-Hispanic pregnant woman because of their food choices. Latinas are more likely to purchase and eat homemade Mexican-style soft cheeses from local vendors – and these cheeses are often made with unpasteurized milk. Many cases of listeriosis within Hispanic communities have been linked to eating homemade cheeses.*

Q. I've never known anyone that had this happen. Why should I worry?

A. *It's very possible that someone you know has lost a baby because of listeriosis, and it just wasn't diagnosed or recorded. The Food and Drug Administration and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) are tracking the incidence of listeriosis in the United States, and they have linked the high incidence of the disease among Hispanic pregnant women to eating Queso Fresco-style cheese made with unpasteurized milk.*

Q&A

Common Questions and Answers From Pregnant Women About Listeriosis (cont'd)

Q. What are the symptoms of listeriosis?

A. *You may experience fever, chills, muscle aches, nausea and diarrhea, or upset stomach. Or, you may not feel sick at all – yet the infection can still severely affect your unborn baby. Listeriosis can lead to miscarriage, stillbirth, premature labor, the delivery of a low-birth-weight infant, a wide range of health problems for a newborn, or even infant death. If infection spreads to your nervous system, headaches, stiff neck, confusion, loss of balance, or convulsions can occur. In extreme cases, death can occur.*

Q. How long does it take to get symptoms?

A. *The symptoms can take a few days or even weeks to appear. If you think you may have eaten contaminated cheese while pregnant, you should see a doctor immediately. A doctor may perform a blood test to see if you have it.*

Q. How can listeriosis be treated?

A. *Your doctor may prescribe antibiotics that are safe to use during pregnancy. Antibiotics may also be given to your baby if he/she is born with listeriosis.*

Q. How can I prevent listeriosis?

A. *The most important thing to do is to avoid eating Mexican-style Queso Fresco cheese, including Queso Fresco, Panela, Asadero, or Queso Blanco made from unpasteurized milk. Do not eat this type of cheese unless it is commercially processed and the label says that it is made with pasteurized milk. Never buy cheese sold door-to-door or from an unlicensed street vendor – chances are it is made from raw (unpasteurized) milk.*

Background Information for Educators

What You Need To Know

I. About *Listeria* and Listeriosis

Listeriosis is a Foodborne Illness

Listeriosis is a serious disease caused by eating foods that are contaminated with the *Listeria monocytogenes* (“*Listeria*”) bacterium.

- This germ is commonly found in soil, water, decaying vegetation, and the intestinal tract of animals.
- It can also be found in:
 - Soft cheeses or other products **made from unpasteurized milk**
 - Processed foods that **become contaminated** — such as deli meats
- Unlike many other foodborne bacteria, *Listeria* grows in the refrigerator.

Heat processes like **pasteurization** destroy *Listeria*. For pregnant women, the key is to **avoid cheeses and other foods made from unpasteurized milk**. If a pregnant woman contracts listeriosis, she can suffer severe consequences – including pre-term labor or the loss of her baby.

Symptoms of Listeriosis

Listeriosis is tricky to detect. Sometimes it causes symptoms. Sometimes a mother may be passing it to her unborn baby *without even knowing it* because she doesn’t feel sick at all.

- **Listeriosis can cause** fever, chills, muscle aches, nausea and diarrhea, or upset stomach. If infection spreads to the nervous system, it can lead to headaches, stiff neck, confusion, loss of balance, or convulsions. In extreme cases, death can occur.
- **Even if there are no symptoms**, the disease can still **severely affect the unborn baby**. It can lead to miscarriage, stillbirth, premature labor, the delivery of a low-birth-weight infant, a wide range of health problems for a newborn, or even infant death.

Symptoms can occur within a few days or even weeks after eating the contaminated cheese.



Treating Listeriosis

Pregnant women (and other people who have weakened immune systems) who believe they have eaten contaminated cheese should seek medical attention immediately. A doctor may need to prescribe antibiotics. A newborn baby may also be given antibiotics if he/she is born with listeriosis.

What You Need To Know (cont'd)

II. Educating about Mexican-style Soft Cheeses

Eating Unpasteurized Cheese Puts Women and their Babies At Risk

Flavors in foods that are like those from home can be a comfort to a person coming to the U.S. from another country. But in the case of Mexican-style soft cheeses made from “raw” (unpasteurized) milk, the results can be tragic.

- As Hispanics emigrate to the U.S., their search for authentic tastes from home unknowingly puts them at risk for listeriosis. The most common cause is the eating of Mexican-style soft cheeses like Queso Fresco that have been made with “raw” unpasteurized milk.
- Many types of cheeses can be made in this style, including: **Queso Fresco, Panela, Asadero and Queso Blanco.**

These soft, white, moist cheeses are a staple in many Hispanic diets. Many feel that these cheeses taste much better made the traditional way with unpasteurized milk. However, what many people probably don't realize is that this taste preference puts them at risk – because **unless the milk is pasteurized first, it can carry the bacteria that cause listeriosis!**



Looking At The Statistics: Pregnant Hispanic Women and Listeriosis

Listeriosis affects people of all races and genders – but **pregnant women** are 20 times more likely than other healthy adults to get listeriosis. Hormonal changes that occur during pregnancy affect the mother's immune system, which leads to greater susceptibility to listeriosis.

- One-third of all listeriosis cases in the U.S. occur in pregnant women¹.

Studies have also revealed that **Pregnant U.S. Hispanic women** are more likely to get listeriosis due to eating homemade Mexican-style soft cheeses made with unpasteurized milk. That's why it's critical to get preventive information out to these women.

Other Risks with Queso Fresco-style Cheeses That Affect All Consumers

Recent illnesses in New York have linked cheese made with unpasteurized milk to **Tuberculosis**. In California, illnesses have linked cheese made with unpasteurized milk to **Brucellosis**.

For more information on these threats, visit the FDA's Web site: www.cfsan.fda.gov.

Alert for Pregnant Women: Don't Buy Homemade Cheese Sold Door-to-Door

Sometimes, Latino entrepreneurs have been known to purchase raw milk and use it to make homemade cheese, then sell it door-to-door or from an ice chest in their communities. Unlicensed vendors also sell it from carts. Remind women not to purchase or eat this cheese. It could harm their unborn child!

¹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2001

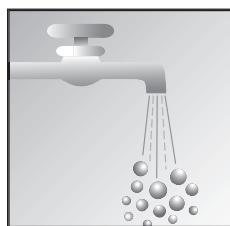
What You Need To Know (cont'd)

III. Preventing Listeriosis

The single most important thing a pregnant Hispanic woman can do to prevent listeriosis is to **avoid eating cheese made from unpasteurized milk**. In addition, there are some general food safety guidelines that can further aid in preventing infection.

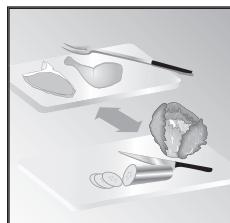
4 Simple Steps to Prevent Foodborne Illness

In addition to avoiding cheese that may have been made from unpasteurized milk, these four simple steps can further reduce the likelihood of getting listeriosis and other foodborne illnesses:



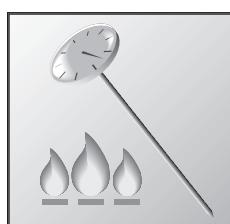
1. Clean

- Before, during, and after food preparation, wash hands and kitchen surfaces often with hot water and soap.
- *Listeria* can grow at refrigerator temperatures, so clean your refrigerator regularly and wipe up spills inside immediately. Use hot water and a mild liquid dishwashing detergent, then rinse thoroughly and dry with a clean cloth or paper towel.



2. Separate

- Keep raw meats separate from other foods, such as fruits and vegetables.



3. Cook

- Thoroughly cook and reheat food to a safe internal temperature before eating. Thoroughly cook meat, poultry, and seafood.



4. Chill

- Your refrigerator should register at **40° F (4° C)** or below. Place a refrigerator thermometer in the refrigerator and check the temperature periodically.
- Store perishable foods that are pre-cooked or ready-to-eat in your refrigerator and eat them *as soon as possible*.

For More Information

Visit www.cfsan.fda.gov (Spanish and English) or call 1-800-SAFEFOOD (English only).

Other On-line Sources:

www.foodsafety.gov

U.S. Partnership for Food Safety Education – www.fightbac.org

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention – www.cdc.gov

United States Department of Agriculture – www.usda.gov

Keep Your Unborn Baby Safe



*Don't Eat Cheeses Made from
Unpasteurized Milk*

**Attention
Pregnant Women:**

Do not eat these Mexican-style soft cheeses unless you're sure they are made from pasteurized milk:

- Asadero
- Panela
- Queso Blanco
- Queso Fresco

Read the Label!



U.S. Department of Health
and Human Services

www.cfsan.fda.gov

FDA
U.S. Food and Drug
Administration

Many women don't realize that they are putting their unborn babies at risk. If you eat Mexican-style soft cheeses made from unpasteurized milk while you are pregnant, you could harm your baby!

Eating Cheese from Unpasteurized Milk Can Cause Listeriosis and Other Diseases

- *Listeria* is a bacteria that causes a disease called **listeriosis**. It can cause birth defects and other serious problems — even the death of your baby.
- Other diseases caused by cheese made from unpasteurized milk include:
 - Tuberculosis
 - Salmonellosis
 - Brucellosis



What does ‘Unpasteurized’ Mean?

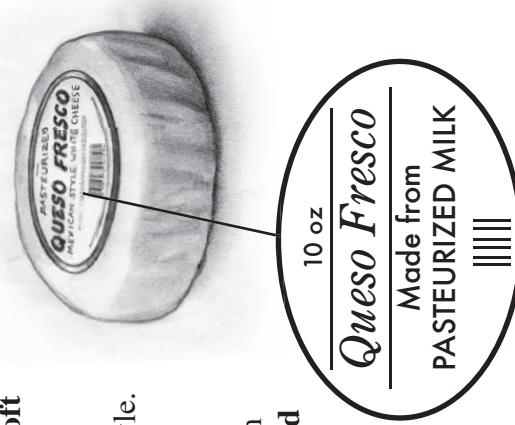
- Pasteurized milk is heated at a processing plant to kill bacteria.
- Unpasteurized (raw) milk can contain dangerous bacteria that can hurt or kill your unborn baby — **even if you don't feel sick!**

Some Cheeses Could Harm Your Unborn Baby!

Cheeses made from raw or “unpasteurized” milk can contain bacteria that might make your baby sick — even before he is born.

“Queso Fresco” is a **Mexican-style soft cheese** that is sometimes made with unpasteurized milk. **Many types of cheeses** are made “Queso Fresco”-style. These include Queso Fresco, Panela, Asadero, and Queso Blanco.

- These unpasteurized cheeses are often sold door-to-door, sold by unlicensed street vendors, or brought into the U.S. from Mexico or Latin America.
- **Before eating any of these soft Mexican-style cheeses, check the label to make sure it says “Made from Pasteurized Milk.”**
If it doesn’t — **do not eat it.**



Or, there may be no symptoms at all!

If You're Concerned That You've Eaten Contaminated Cheese While Pregnant:

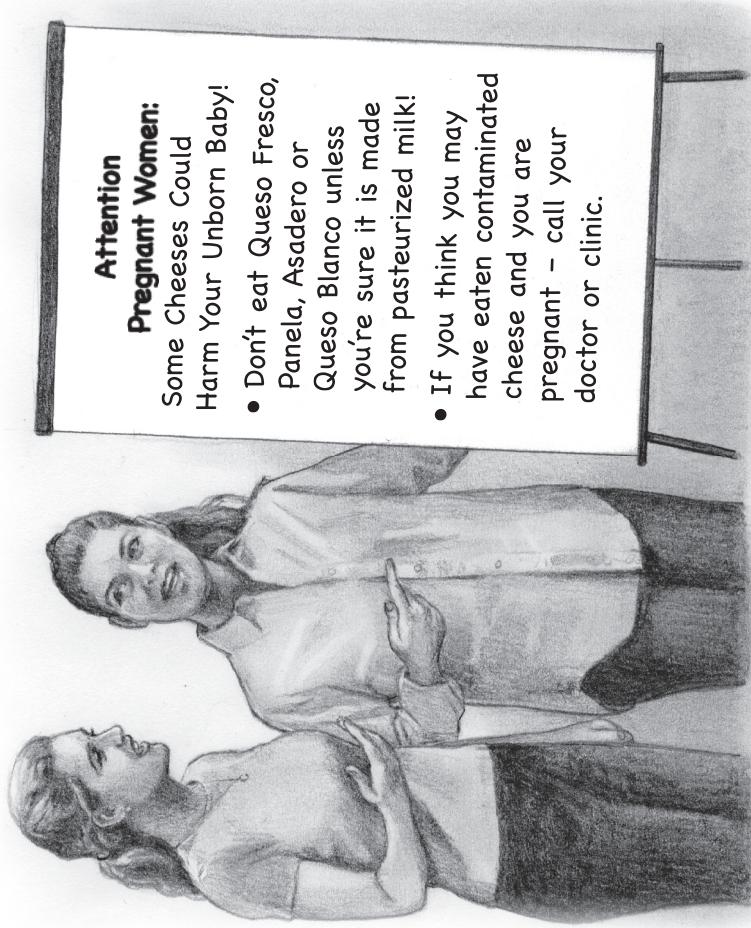
- Call your doctor or clinic right away
 - Your doctor may prescribe antibiotics that are safe to take during pregnancy

Maribel's Story



*How eating Queso Fresco
harmmed her unborn baby.*

Rosario: I know. But what happened to Maribel and Hector doesn't always happen. You can usually treat listeriosis with antibiotics that help the mother and the unborn baby. Your doctor can give you a blood test to see if you have it – so women who have eaten cheese made with unpasteurized milk can go to the doctor and get checked out. But in Maribel's case it was too late.

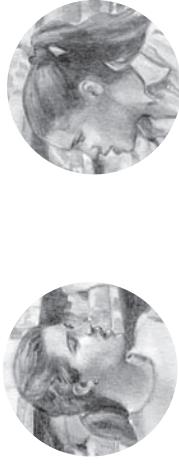


Cristina: Maribel's story makes me so sad. But one important thing we can do is tell other people about this – especially friends who are pregnant, and their families.

Rosario: That's right. Hector and Maribel have been spreading the word, too. They believe that one good thing that can come from this terrible tragedy is to prevent it from happening to anyone else.

Cristina: You can count on me to help spread the word . . .

Introducing



Cristina



Hector

Rosario



Maribel



Do not eat
'Queso Fresco'-style
Cheese:
Queso Fresco,
Panela, Queso
Blanco or Asadero,
if made from
unpasteurized milk.

Dr. Nieves: I'm sorry, Mr. and Mrs. Sanchez. Your baby was stillborn. She died from an infection called listeriosis. You passed this infection onto your baby without even knowing it. You can get infected with the Listeria bacteria from eating Queso Fresco made from unpasteurized milk. There are several types of queso fresco-style cheeses that might be unpasteurized, and pregnant women shouldn't eat them.

Rosario: Unfortunately, like many Latina women who crave the taste of Queso Fresco from home, Maribel didn't know to look for the "pasteurization" label – and because of that, her unborn baby got sick and died. Dr. Nieves said that the symptoms of listeriosis can include fever, chills, muscle aches, upset stomach, nausea and/or diarrhea. But then, Dr. Nieves also said that it's very common for a pregnant woman to have listeriosis and not even know it because she doesn't feel sick. That's why it's so important to avoid eating cheese made from unpasteurized milk or cheese made from unknown sources.

For questions about the information in this publication, contact:

U.S. Food and Drug Administration
5100 Paint Branch Parkway
College Park, MD 20740



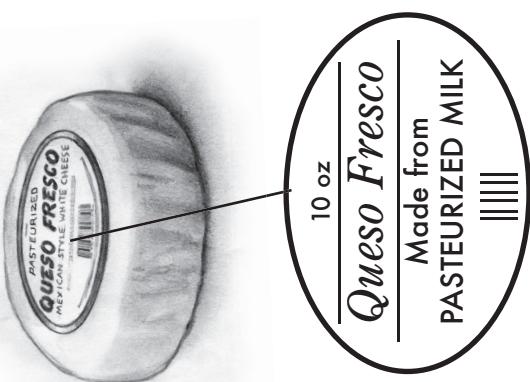
www.cfsan.fda.gov

Cristina: Wow – that is scary. Poor Maribel and Hector.

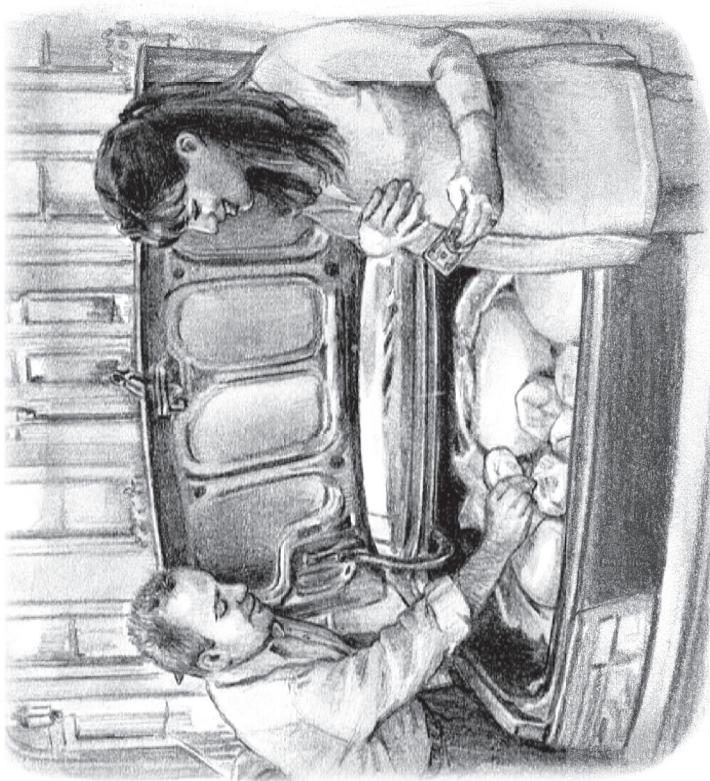
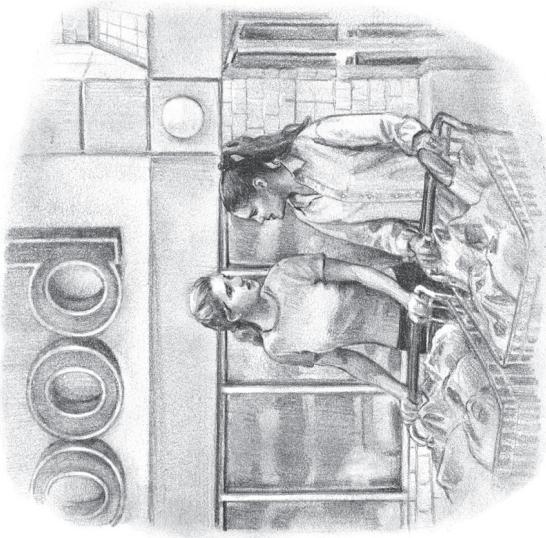
Rosario: Maribel didn't know to ask, but the cheese she bought was not made with pasteurized milk.

Cristina: What does this mean, "pasteurized"?

Rosario: When cheese is made from pasteurized milk, it means that the milk used to make the cheese has been processed to kill bacteria. See, look at this label – "Made from Pasteurized Milk."

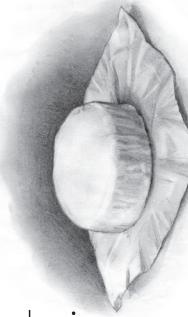


Rosario: Unfortunately, this was not the case with the cheese Maribel bought. It hadn't been pasteurized to kill bacteria. All she wanted was to eat cheese that tasted like the kind made in Mexico – but instead, the Queso Fresco she bought from the door-to-door vendor was contaminated with bacteria called *Listeria*.



Maribel: Wow – Queso Fresco just like in Mexico!

Gonzalo - Vendor: I make it myself – like my dad used to make back home. I get raw milk straight from a local farmer. There's nothing like it in the stores in the U.S.

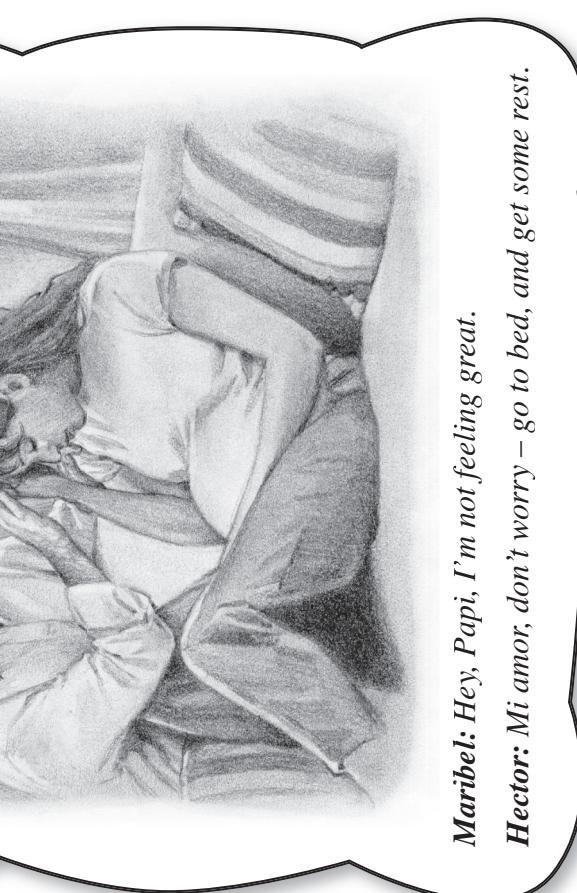


Maribel: I crave the taste of homemade Queso Fresco like I remember from home. I'll take two packages. Thank you!

Rosario: For awhile, Maribel felt fine. But then, she started to feel sick ...

Cristina: Oh look, they have Queso Fresco here. But it doesn't taste the same as the kind we used to eat in Mexico. Remember how our mothers would buy the milk fresh from the dairy farm and make the cheese at home?

Rosario: Yes, I remember. But eating Queso Fresco like we used to isn't worth the risk – especially after the tragedy that happened to my neighbor Maribel.



Maribel: Hey, Papi, I'm not feeling great.

Hector: Mi amor, don't worry – go to bed, and get some rest.

Rosario: But several days passed and Maribel didn't feel any better. Her husband Hector started to worry. Finally, one night he convinced her to go to the hospital.

Cristina: What happened?

Rosario: She lost her baby. It turns out that she had gotten an infection called listeriosis and she passed it to her baby without knowing it.

Cristina: Oh, no. She lost the baby because of bacteria from the cheese?



Cristina: A tragedy? What happened?

Rosario: Oh, it's so sad – I thought you heard. Maribel ate Queso Fresco she bought from a vendor selling cheese door to door ...

♥ ♥ ♥ ♥ ♥ ♥ ♥ ♥ Attention Pregnant Women ♥ ♥ ♥ ♥ ♥ ♥ ♥ ♥

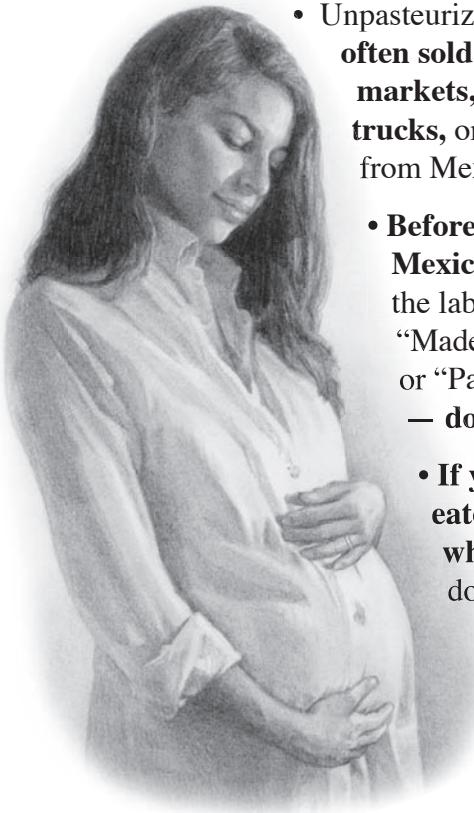
Some Cheeses Could Harm Your Unborn Baby!

Don't eat Queso Fresco, Panela, Asadero or Queso Blanco unless you're sure it is made from pasteurized milk.

Cheeses made from raw or “**unpasteurized**” milk can contain bacteria that might make your baby sick — even before he’s born.

You can help keep your baby safe by avoiding cheeses made from unpasteurized milk. Here’s what you need to know:

- “Queso Fresco” is a **Mexican-style soft cheese** that is sometimes made with unpasteurized milk. **Many types of cheeses** can be made “Queso Fresco” style — including Queso Fresco, Panela, Asadero, and Queso Blanco.

- 
- Unpasteurized cheeses are **often sold door-to-door, at flea markets, from the back of trucks**, or brought into the U.S. from Mexico or Central America.
 - **Before eating any of these soft Mexican-style cheeses**, read the label to make sure it says “Made from Pasteurized Milk,” or “Pasteurized.” If it doesn’t — **do not eat the cheese.**
 - **If you think you may have eaten contaminated cheese while pregnant**, call your doctor or clinic.

What Does “Pasteurized” Mean?

- Pasteurized means that a food, like milk, is heated at a processing plant to **kill bacteria**.
- Unpasteurized (raw) milk has not been heated at a processing plant, and may contain dangerous bacteria that can hurt or kill your unborn baby — **even if you don't feel sick!**

Eating Cheeses Made From Unpasteurized Milk Can Cause Listeriosis

- This dangerous disease can cause birth defects and other serious problems — even the death of your baby.

Cheese Made From Unpasteurized Milk Can Cause Other Diseases, Too

These have been known to include:

- Tuberculosis
- Salmonellosis
- Brucellosis

**Help Keep Your Unborn Baby Safe.
Do not eat Queso Fresco-style cheeses made
with unpasteurized milk!**



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