

## Standard 3

### Food Safety during Pregnancy

**Share important food safety messages with families including foods to limit or avoid during pregnancy.**

#### Why is this Standard important?

During pregnancy, there are changes that make it harder for a woman to fight off infections. The unborn baby's immune system is not fully ready to fight infections either, and this makes both mom and baby more vulnerable to getting sick when mom eats unsafe foods (also known as foodborne illness).

Pregnant women are more likely to get sicker than they would if they were not pregnant. Some foodborne illnesses can cause a miscarriage, can cause the baby to be born early, or can cause health problems and even death for the child once they are born.

#### Help moms to be food safe:

There are many bacteria such as *E. coli* O157:H7 and *Salmonella* that can make us sick, especially during pregnancy. Like the rest of the family, moms should follow the guidelines that are good for everyone to follow:

<b>CLEAN:</b>	Wash hands and surfaces often.
<b>SEPARATE:</b>	Don't cross-contaminate. For example, after cutting meat, wash the knife before using it to cut vegetables.
<b>COOK:</b>	Cook to proper temperature using a food thermometer.
<b>CHILL:</b>	Refrigerate promptly.

More detailed information about these four topics is available in the Standard 10 – Food Safety section. In addition to these general guidelines, there are specific recommendations for pregnant women to protect themselves and their unborn babies:

## Foodborne Risks for Pregnant Women

As a mom-to-be, there are a few specific foodborne risks that she needs to be aware of. These risks can cause serious illness or death to her or her unborn child. She can follow these steps to help ensure a healthy pregnancy:

### 1. *Listeria monocytogenes*

What it is: A harmful bacterium that can grow at refrigerator temperatures where most other foodborne bacteria do not. It causes an illness called listeriosis.

Where it's found: Refrigerated, ready-to-eat foods and unpasteurized milk and milk products.

#### How to prevent illness:

- Follow the 4 Simple Steps above – clean, separate, cook, and chill.
- Do not eat hot dogs and luncheon meats - unless they're reheated until steaming hot.
- Do not eat soft cheese, such as Feta, Brie, Camembert, "blue-veined cheeses," "queso blanco," "queso fresco," and Panela - unless it's labeled as made with pasteurized milk. Check the label.
- Do not eat refrigerated pâtés or meat spreads.
- Do not eat refrigerated smoked seafood - unless it's in a cooked dish, such as a casserole. (Refrigerated smoked seafood, such as salmon, trout, whitefish, cod, tuna, or mackerel, is most often labeled as "nova-style," "lox," "kippered," "smoked," or "jerky." These types of fish are found in the refrigerator section or sold at deli counters of grocery stores and delicatessens.)
- Do not drink raw (unpasteurized) milk or eat foods that contain unpasteurized milk.

### 2. Methylmercury

What it is: A metal that can be found in certain fish. At high levels, it can be harmful to an unborn baby's developing nervous system.

Where it's found: Large, long-lived fish, such as shark, tilefish, king mackerel, and swordfish.

#### How to prevent illness:

- Don't eat shark, tilefish, king mackerel, and swordfish. These fish can contain high levels of methylmercury.
- It's okay to eat other cooked fish/seafood as long as a variety of other kinds are selected during pregnancy or while a woman is trying to become pregnant. She can eat up to 12 ounces (2 average meals) a week of a variety of fish and shellfish that are lower in mercury. Five of the most commonly eaten fish that are low in mercury are shrimp, canned light tuna, salmon, pollock, and catfish. Another commonly eaten fish, albacore ("white") tuna has more mercury than canned light tuna. So, when choosing your two meals of fish and shellfish, you may eat up to 6 ounces (one average meal) of albacore tuna per week.

### **3. *Toxoplasma gondii***

What it is: A harmful parasite. It causes an illness called toxoplasmosis that can be difficult to detect.

Where it's found: Raw and undercooked meat; unwashed fruits and vegetables; contaminated water, soil; dirty cat-litter boxes; and outdoor places where cat feces can be found.

#### **How to prevent illness:**

- Follow the 4 Simple Steps above – clean, separate, cook, and chill.
- If possible, have someone else change the litter box. If you have to clean it, wash your hands with soap and warm water afterwards.
- Wear gloves when gardening or handling sand from a sandbox.
- Don't get a new cat while pregnant.
- Cook meat thoroughly: see the chart for the proper temperatures.

### **4. Lead**

What it is: Lead is a metal that can be toxic if consumed by humans, especially young kids and babies before they are born. Too much lead can cause a mom to miscarry, can cause the baby to be born too early, can hurt the baby's brain, kidneys, and nervous system, and can cause learning or behavior problems.

Where it's found: Lead exposure can occur from multiple sources, but some foods and food containers are possible sources.

#### **How to prevent lead exposure from foods:**

- Eat foods with calcium, iron, and vitamin C. These foods may help protect the mom and her unborn baby.
- Use caution when eating candies, spices, and other foods that have been brought into the country by travelers, especially if they appear to be noncommercial products.
- Store food properly. Some dishes may contain lead. It is important to store and serve your food properly (see next four points).
- Avoid using imported lead-glazed ceramic pottery produced in cottage industries (like small, family businesses).
- Avoid using pewter or brass containers or utensils to cook, serve, or store food.
- Avoid using leaded crystal to serve or store beverages.
- Do not use dishes that are chipped or cracked.