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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

September 20, 2002

LISTERIA PREVENTION

The Westchester County Department of Health today reminded residents that Listeriosis, a food-borne illness caused by the bacteria *Listeria*, can often be prevented by avoiding certain high-risk foods. These include, soft, runny cheeses and unpasteurized dairy products. *Listeria* contamination has also been found in deli meats and hot dogs.

Listeriosis is a food-borne illness that can cause mild symptoms, such as fever, muscle aches, abdominal pain, nausea, and diarrhea in healthy people. However, in pregnant women, *Listeria* can cause stillbirths and can be potentially fatal to newborns, persons over 60 years of age, and those with compromised immune systems.

“In the past, outbreaks of disease caused by *Listeria* have been associated with unpasteurized milk, soft cheeses, contaminated vegetables, and ready-to-eat meats,” said Joshua Lipsman, M.D., M.P.H., Commissioner of Health for Westchester County. “Dairy products and ready-to-eat cold cuts can become contaminated after processing, so to avoid *Listeria* infection, residents should consume only thoroughly cooked meats and pasteurized dairy products. Those at an increased risk for becoming seriously ill due to *Listeria* can minimize their exposure to the bacteria by avoiding soft, runny cheeses; unpasteurized dairy products; pates; hot dogs; and cold cuts,” he added.

Listeriosis is caused by bacteria that are commonly found in soil, water, and animal feed. Listeriosis is not spread through casual contact. Symptoms include fever, muscle aches, abdominal pains, nausea, and diarrhea. If the infection spreads to the nervous system, symptoms such as headache, stiff neck, confusion, loss of balance, or convulsions may occur. In large outbreaks, symptoms have developed between three and 70 days, but in most instances, symptoms develop within a month.

For more information about *Listeria*, contact the Westchester County Department of Health at (914) 813-5000 or visit the Health Department’s website at www.westchestergov.com/health.

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