

PHHS BLOCK GRANT SUCCESS STORY 2016

COMMODITY-SPECIFIC SURVEILLANCE: FOOD AND DRUG PROGRAM

FOOD AND DRUG BRANCH TESTS OVER 800 SAMPLES FOR PATHOGENS.

Issue: Foodborne pathogens, including *Listeria monocytogenes*, cause significant illness in the public every year in the United States. *Listeria monocytogenes* generally causes illness in (1) pregnant women, (2) older adults, and (3) those with compromised immune systems. Approximately 1,600 illnesses and 260 deaths due to listeriosis occur annually in the United States.

Listeria monocytogenes has been isolated in many types of foods, including (1) unpasteurized dairy products, (2) ready-to-eat meats, (3) seafood, and (4) fresh vegetables. Foodborne illness investigations into outbreaks of *L. monocytogenes* have shown that this organism may become established in a food processing environment. Once established, these bacterial colonies become very difficult to remove and will likely continue to contaminate food products that are processed and handled in that environment.

Intervention: PHHS Block Grant funds have allowed the California Department of Public Health Food and Drug Branch to increase surveillance sampling of foods for *L. monocytogenes* and other pathogens that may cause illness in California consumers. Since July 2016, Food and Drug Branch personnel have collected over 800 samples of food items from retail stores, including fresh sprouts and seeds. In conjunction with the Food and Drug Laboratory Branch, these samples have been tested for *L. monocytogenes* and other pathogens.

Impact: Although samples collected during this funding cycle have all tested negative, sample collection will continue through June 2017. Any positive findings will result in regulatory action by the Food and Drug Branch, which could include a recall of affected products and environmental assessments at the processing location.