



Wild Bird Feeding Industry

"Dedicated to the progressive expansion of the backyard wild bird and backyard wildlife feeding industry"

Listeria Impact on Wild Bird Feeding

Background: In May 2016, a WBF member issued a human food product recall through the FDA portal for human food sunflower kernels. The kernels were recalled due to possible listeria. Because the company also processes and packages wild bird feed, the Scientific Industry Response (SIR) Committee asked for more information on listeria in order for WBF to be prepared to address listeria concerns with the public. This document is intended to be a resource for WBF members to know where to go for information on listeria in the event the member is contacted by a concerned consumer.

Listeria monocytogenes is an organism which can cause serious or sometimes fatal infections in young children, frail or elderly people, and others with weakened immune systems. Although healthy individuals may suffer only short-term symptoms such as high fever, severe headache, stiffness, nausea, abdominal pain and diarrhea, *Listeria* infection can cause miscarriages and stillbirths among pregnant women. (Source: FDA recall notices)

A review of the FDA human food product recall website <http://www.fda.gov/Safety/Recalls/default.htm> will give you an overview of the ongoing human food product recalls. We suggest you visit this website to understand the breadth of a human food safety issue.

The FDA animal food and pet food recall website <http://www.fda.gov/AnimalVeterinary/SafetyHealth/RecallsWithdrawals/default.htm> lists the animal food and pet food product recalls. Historically, the pet and animal food recalls are much fewer in number than the human food. In May 2016, there are no active animal or pet food recalls, including wild bird food, for *listeria monocytogenes*. To take this statement one step further, the human food recall in progress on sunflower kernels has not expanded to include wild bird feed or other animal or pet food uses for sunflower kernels.

WBF Headquarters contacted Dr. David Horn, Millikin University Department of Biology, to request additional information on listeria. Here is Dr. Horn's response:

Since our correspondence, I have had a chance to do a brief review of resources on the impact of Listeria (Listeriosis) on wild birds. In short, there is little information about listeria at a number of resources that generally contain comprehensive information about bird and other wildlife diseases. I interpret this to mean that listeria has minimal impact on the birds that use feeders, particularly relative to other diseases such as avian pox, Salmonella, etc.

Here is a summary of results found at the following locations:

Cornell Lab of Ornithology - No results found for Listeria.

Birds of North America Online - Listeria was mentioned in two articles. Listeria has been found in Ring-necked Pheasants, and may have been a disease in the now extinct Carolina Parakeet.

National Wildlife Health Center - An article titled "Screening for potential human pathogens in fecal material deposited by resident Canada geese on areas of public utility" was found. The article indicates that listeria has been found in domesticated geese and some gull species.

Furthermore, a brief search of peer-reviewed articles indicated the presence of listeria in a couple of other species.

I recommend that you visit the CDC website if you haven't done so already. An initial review of the website indicates that most of the precautions for preventing listeria, outside of washing hands, are associated with food preparation.

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Association Alliances: Bird Education Network (BEN) • Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology • American Feed Industry Association AFI



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Talking points for the public

WBFi suggests the following points may be helpful to WBFi members who may be contacted by the public about listeria:

- *Listeria monocytogenes* are naturally occurring and surround us all constantly.
- Human food preparation methods for those people who might be considered susceptible according to the FDA statement at the beginning of this document should follow the guidelines from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC).
- When handling wild bird feed, the WBFi recommends:
 - Store your wild bird feed in an airtight, sealed container in order to prevent pests and rodents from contaminating your wild bird feed.
 - When filling your bird feeders, be sure the area is well ventilated.
 - Following handling of bird feed and bird feeders, wash your hands and any scoops or measuring devices using soap and water.

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