

RESEARCH OF LISTERIA MONOCYTOGENES IN READY-TO-EAT FOODS COMMERCIALIZED IN THE STATE OF RIO DE JANEIRO

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SUMMARY

Foodborne diseases (FBD) are of major importance in currently world scenario and are classified as a public health problem. Among the major FBD causing microorganisms in the world, *Listeria monocytogenes* can be present in ready-to-eat foods because of their survival characteristics under adverse environmental conditions. Listeriosis is considered a foodborne disease of great importance in public health due to its seriousness; the high lethality rate (20-30%) and the propensity of certain individuals to develop the disease. The objective of this study was to investigate, through conventional and molecular techniques, the presence of *L. monocytogenes* in these types of food and to identify the serovar of the isolates. Sixty-seven samples of ready-to-eat foods marketed in the state of Rio de Janeiro were analyzed. RDC 12/2001, which establishes microbiological standards for foods in Brazil, determines the absence of *L. monocytogenes* only in cheese of medium and high humidity. Of the 67 ready-to-eat foods samples analyzed, 14 (20.9%) samples were contaminated with *L. monocytogenes*, eight (11.9%) of cheese Minas type, four (6.0%) of salads and two (3.0%) of foods from japanese cookery. The serotypes found were 1/2a, in a sample of cheese Minas type and 1/2b in the other samples. The presence of *L. monocytogenes* in ready-to-eat foods represents a risk to the population's health, especially those belonging to the risk groups, such as pregnant women, elderly and immunosuppressed persons. It is necessary to provide guidance to consumers, especially those belonging to risk groups, about the risks involved in the consumption of these foods. A risk analysis of these products should be considered by the Sanitary Surveillance organisms in order to avoid damages to the population's health due to the consumption of *L. monocytogenes* in contaminated products.

Keywords: Ready-to-eat foods, *Listeria monocytogenes*, listeriosis, serotyping, food safety.

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