



# WHILE PREGNANT, BE CAREFUL WITH QUESO FRESCO

Maria and her friend Isabela are sitting in Isabela's kitchen discussing the baby shower Maria will be hosting for her friend, Lucinda. Maria shares the menu with Isabela to get her opinion. Since Isabela recently planned a baby shower for her sister, she offered to help Maria.



Isabela, thank you for helping me plan Lucinda's baby shower.

No problem, Maria. I just hosted my sister's baby shower, so I'm an expert now!



I plan to serve chicken enchiladas with queso fresco, rice and beans, cake, and juice. Did I leave anything out?

Which queso fresco are you planning to use?



My neighbor has a special queso fresco that he gave me for the party. But, I'm not sure where it is from. It is wrapped in plastic wrap with no label.

Maria, you must be very careful. Pregnant women shouldn't eat soft cheeses, like queso fresco, unless the label says they were made with "pasteurized milk."



Why not?

Soft cheeses that are not made with pasteurized milk can have harmful germs, like *Listeria*.



What does it mean? What's *Listeria*?



*Listeria* is a germ that causes some people to get really sick – like newborn babies, older adults, and people with weakened immune systems. My friend Anna's baby was very sick when he was born because Anna ate food that had *Listeria* on it.

It's so sad. Pregnant women with *Listeria* infection are much more likely than other expectant moms to have a miscarriage or stillbirth.



Oh, no! That's terrible! I don't want to serve any foods that could hurt my friend or her baby.

Wow! I've never seen the word "pasteurized" on my neighbor's cheeses. I'll buy my cheeses from a store from now on and look for the word "pasteurized" on the label.



Yes, that's much better. You should also know that some of our popular cheeses, like queso fresco – even those made from pasteurized milk – have caused people to get sick from *Listeria*.

Really? How bad is it?



*Listeria* is one of the main causes of death from food poisoning in the United States. In fact, pregnant Hispanic women get *Listeria* infection more often than anyone else.

So, what does it mean for the milk to be pasteurized?



"Pasteurized" means the milk has been heated to kill *Listeria* and other germs. Pasteurizing the milk helps protect people from getting sick from these germs.

I thought you said that pasteurizing the milk would kill the germs. How did they still get sick?



Pasteurization does kill the germs in milk. But the cheese was made in unclean places, and that's how it got contaminated with *Listeria*.

You've given me a lot to think about, Isabela. For the baby shower, I will serve chicken and rice instead. But I still need to learn more.



Of course! If you have more questions about *Listeria*, you can go to [www.cdc.gov/listeria](http://www.cdc.gov/listeria).

Thank you so much! I will definitely read more on this website.



Only buy soft cheeses with the word "pasteurized" on the label.



## Reduce your risk during pregnancy to protect your baby.

- While pregnant, you should not eat soft cheeses, such as queso fresco, unless they are made with pasteurized milk, to lower the risk of getting infection from *Listeria* or other foodborne germs.
  - Pasteurization is the process of heating milk to a high enough temperature for a long enough time to kill harmful bacteria, like *Listeria*, contained in milk.
- Also be aware that cheeses, such as queso fresco, that are made from pasteurized milk but were contaminated when the cheese was being made, have also caused *Listeria* infections.



**Types of soft cheeses include** queso fresco, queso blanco, queso blando, queso cotija, queso panela, queso ranchero, and cuajada en terrón.

**For more information about *Listeria*, please visit [www.cdc.gov/listeria](http://www.cdc.gov/listeria) or [www.cdc.gov/spanish/listeria](http://www.cdc.gov/spanish/listeria)**