Listeria monocytogenes is a short, rod-shaped bacterium. Twenty of them lined up end-to-end would equal the length of a grain of pollen. Listeria causes nearly 2,500 illnesses per year in the United States and about 500 deaths. It has up to five whip-like tails that help it move. Listeria loves cool, wet places and grows fast in dairy products like soft cheese, sandwich meat, and hotdogs. You can stop Listeria by throwing away any foods that have passed the expiration date on the package and by making sure the food you eat is clean and fully cooked.