



health

Department:  
Health  
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

**03 September 2018**

## **MEDIA STATEMENT BY THE MINISTER HEALTH ON LISTERIOSIS OUTBREAK**

On 5 December 2017 we announced that South Africa was hit by the outbreak of listeriosis. A joint Public health emergency Co-ordinating committee was established including NDoH, DAFF, DTi, NCC, NRCS, DEA, SALGA and DMs to co-ordinate investigations and response. On the 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2018, the National Institute for Communicable Disease (NICD), working together with partners present here today, confirmed that source of the Listeria outbreak strain (Lm ST-6) was a ready-to-eat (RTE) processed meat plant owned by Tiger Brands (the Enterprise Foods® Polokwane production facility). We also identified Listeria at a RCL-owned facility (Rainbow Foods®). On 4 March 2018, we instructed that all ready-to-eat processed meat products produced at these facilities be recalled immediately.

Subsequent to this recall, 05 April 2018, the World Health Organisation (WHO) increased its technical support to South Africa to enable the country to contain the outbreak and to strengthen health systems to prevent future outbreaks. This increased technical support provided by WHO is in line with International Health Regulations (IHR 2005) and the implementation of the recommendations of the Joint External Evaluation (JEE).

On the same day (5 April 2018), the Department of Health and the National Institute for Communicable Disease NICD, supported by World Health Organisation, drew up an Emergency Response Plan (ERP) to control and end the outbreak, and to strengthen systems to prevent further listeriosis outbreaks.

An Incident Management Team was formed comprising of officials from NDoH, NICD, NHLS, Department of Trade Industry, National Consumer Council, National Regulator for Compulsory Specifications, Department Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, Department of Environmental Affairs, South African Military Health Services, South African Local Government Association and District Municipalities (Tshwane, City of Johannesburg and Ekurhuleni). The Team worked at the NICD Emergency Operations Centre.

Almost 900 environmental health practitioners in every health district in South Africa have been re-trained in factory inspections, food safety systems and testing of factories for Listeria.

The Department, Metropolitan and District Municipalities and the Listeria Incident Management have inspected all processed meat factories in South Africa. The teams identified 157 facilities that produce ready-to-eat meat, and conducted food and environmental testing for Listeria. Of 157 facilities, 51 were in Gauteng, 46 in Western Cape, 15 in KwaZulu Natal,

The Department of Environmental Affairs reports that 5812 tons of affected foodstuffs have been recalled and destroyed since the beginning of March this year. This process of destruction is ongoing and will be completed by end September.

A team of WHO, International and local experts agreed that

- 1) because no cases of listeriosis due to the outbreak strain have been identified since the **first week of June 2018** and that
- 2) over the last two months, the incidence rate of laboratory-confirmed listeriosis cases has dropped to pre-outbreak levels,

**Therefore, the outbreak of listeriosis is over.**

### **Positive spin-offs of this Listeriosis outbreak**

- As a country, and with the technical support of the World Health Organisation, we have put in place a surveillance system to find and test all Listeria isolates from human cases to identify clusters (groups) of cases that may represent outbreaks. Early investigation of groups of cases will detect outbreaks and identify affected foods early.
- Food safety laws have been updated. All factories that make ready-to-eat processed meat and chicken need to have food safety management systems in place according to Regulation R607 published on 14 June 2018. In the meantime, inspections of factories are ongoing according to updated Hygiene regulations
- The Department of Health, NICD and other partners have shared information about food safety, and how to avoid Listeria for persons who are at risk.

A number of activities described in the Emergency Response Plan are ongoing. These will further strengthen systems to prevent and detect listeriosis outbreaks including ongoing legislative reform regarding food safety. Ongoing environmental awareness activities have been planned to take place during September.

Despite concerted efforts, our investigators – both government and private sector, have not been able to demonstrate how the outbreak strain ended up in the affected factory.

Today's announcement means that ready-to-eat processed meat can now be safely consumed, as before the outbreak. This does not mean that people will no longer suffer from listeriosis – remember, Listeriosis has occurred in South Africa for the past 40 years. The NICD has shown us that there are between 60-80 cases of listeriosis every year in South Africa for the past 5 years. People are encouraged to practice good food safety including:

- 1) Keep clean including good hand hygiene practices
- 2) Separate raw and cooked food
- 3) Cook food thoroughly
- 4) Keep food at safe temperatures
- 5) Use safe water and raw materials

The Ministry of Health would like to acknowledge, on behalf of the country and government of South Africa the support of all who contributed time, energy and effort towards the activities described in this report. Special thanks are due to the World Health Organisation for technical expertise and financial contributions towards the control and ending of the outbreak.

**Thank you**  
**[end]**



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**3 September 2018**

## **MEDIA STATEMENT BY THE MINISTER HEALTH ON ALLEGATIONS OF FAKE AND EXPIRED FOOD**

Since mid-July this year, the country was hit by an avalanche of food related videos that are circulating on social media about the alleged 'unsafe' manufacturing of certain fake foods in South Africa.

Ordinarily, we would have dismissed these as part of the modern times industry of fake news, but due to the high volume of complaints received by the Department in the past few days, we took these allegations seriously as potential for danger to human health.

While the authenticity of these videos cannot be verified, we had to act swiftly on allegations of expired foodstuff sold to the public. We have the responsibility to determine if there is truth into these allegations, and where necessary, take urgent action against perpetrators.

On 8 August 2018, the Chief Directorate, Environmental Health in the Department of Health wrote letters to all 52 district municipalities and metros asking them to conduct inspection blitzes in all food premises. These inspections commenced immediately thereafter, but it was not publicized.

As of today, 12 districts and metropolitan areas out of 52 have handed in reports. These are Alfred Nzo, Frances Baart, John Taolo Gaetsewe; Eden District Municipality; Central Karoo; Ugu District Municipality; City of Johannesburg; City of Ekurhuleni; Gert Sibande District Municipality; Sedibeng and Nelson Mandela Bay. A total of 102 joint operations with the South African Police were undertaken by Environmental Health Practitioners. 454 premises were reached. The operation revealed that 281 premises were operating without valid Health Certificates. 100 premises were issued with Notices to **stop** operations. 292 premises were found to be **non-compliant**. 2151 foodstuff items (864kg and 537 litres) were **seized**. 1296 foodstuff items (7475 kg and 101 litres) were detained for further investigation. All this work was done from 8 August 2018 to date and is ongoing.

On 31 August the National Consumer Commission together with the City of Tshwane, the Companies and Intellectual Properties Commission, National Regulator for

Compulsory Specifications, SAPS and representatives of the trade mark owners. Six premises were closed down. Five of them for non-compliance with their zoning certificates and one for the them for trading in counterfeit goods.

We note that there is confusion amongst the public between counterfeit food, fake food, expired food, best-before date and sell-by date.

There are three dates recognized by the Codex Alimentarius Commission (this is the WHO and FAO that control matters pertaining to food consumption around the world).

- Best-before date: This is for long shelf life dry or canned products. It is used for stock rotation and is not an indicator of safety.
- Sell-by date: This has been used for perishable food which is usually stored in a refrigerator. The meaning and implications of this date has caused so much confusion globally that in July this year the Codex Alimentarius Commission has discontinued the use of this date. It is no longer relevant
- Use-by / Expiry date: this is the 'expiry date' as we know it. It means that food is no longer palatable after this date. For perishable food, this means it can no longer be consumed.

The other confusing terms are:

- Counterfeit goods: these are goods manufactured and sold under another companies brand name. The term 'fake food' has been used by social media to refer to food that does not contain food substances – for example 'plastic food' or 'bread that does not dissolve in water'.

The food industry has been requested to confirm the authenticity of potential counterfeit foodstuffs which include verifying the brands of their products such as soft drinks, tinned foodstuffs, etc. currently displayed on social media platforms.

The Department is working in partnership with other Government regulatory authorities from Agriculture and Trade and Industry including the National Consumer Commission, to confirm allegations of compromised quality standards.

The public is encouraged to notify environmental health practitioners and the South African Police Services regarding any suspicious foodstuffs and provide evidence where possible.

**Some media organisation, informed us around 15 August 2018 that they are doing their own investigation of on the 'alleged fake and expired food' and that they are going to buy these fake foodstuffs.** To date, the Ministry of Health has **not** received evidence of fake foodstuff made of material such as plastic. We have **not** received any reports or notifications of human illness associated with such 'fake' food products doing rounds on social media.

Yes, we have removed and destroyed expired foodstuff in premises that have been inspected.

We appeal to the public, including the media, to bring to authorities tangible evidence of food-stuff made of non-biological and potentially harmful substances and chemicals; including bringing to our attention the sales of expired food. Public are requested to call the NDoH hotline 011-386-2003/6 during office hours, and the NCC hotline 012-428-7000.

I thank you.  
[end]