

The outbreak of listeriosis is over - Motsoaledi

Grocery stores have been given the green light to once again stock processed meat on shelves and pack them in lunch boxes. This comes almost six months after polony and other ready-to-eat processed meats were declared no-go areas by the Department of Health.



“A team of World Health Organisation (WHO) international and local experts [have] agreed that because no cases of listeriosis due to the outbreak strain have been identified since the first week of June 2018 and that over the last two months the incidence rate of laboratory-confirmed listeriosis cases has dropped to pre-outbreak levels, the outbreak of listeriosis is over,” said Health Minister Aaron Motsoaledi.

While processed meats were officially given the clear at a media briefing on Monday, Motsoaledi warned the public that listeria is still a reality.

“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,” said Motsoaledi.

On 4 March earlier this year, the Minister convened an urgent press briefing recalling all ready-to-eat processed meat products produced by [Enterprise Foods and Rainbow Foods](#) where listeria was identified.



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14 May 2018



5,812 tonnes of affected foodstuffs recalled

Following the recall, an emergency response plan was drafted by the Health Department and the National Institute for Communicable Disease (NICD), while supported by the World Health Organisation. The last six months saw the collaborative plan being rolled out to control and end the outbreak that left 164 people dead.

An Incident Management Team was formed, comprising officials from the department, NICD, NHLS, Department of Trade Industry, National Consumer Council, National Regulator for Compulsory Specifications, Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, Department of Environmental Affairs, South African Military Health Services, South African Local Government Association and district municipalities from Tshwane, 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,” said Motsoaledi.

Of 157 facilities, 51 were in Gauteng, 46 in Western Cape, 15 in KwaZulu-Natal.

The Department of Environmental Affairs reported that 5,812 tonnes of affected foodstuffs were recalled and destroyed since the declaration of the outbreak. The clean-up operation is ongoing and will be completed by the end of September.

Despite efforts by investigators, Motsoaledi said both government and the private sector have not been able to demonstrate how the outbreak strain ended up in the affected factories.

According to the department, a total of R12 million was spent in response to the outbreak.



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Preventing future outbreaks

Following the outbreak, the Department of Health has put in place a surveillance system to find and test all Listeria isolates and 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,” said the Minister.

