

**3 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]**