

JOINT PRESS RELEASE BY THE MINISTRY OF HEALTH AND MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE IN RESPONSE TO THE OUTBREAK OF LISTERIOSIS IN SOUTH AFRICA

INTRODUCTION

The Republic of South Africa has confirmed that the cases of human listeriosis originate from consumption of processed food of animal origin. The food implicated is processed meat including polony, vienna, sausages, and other cold meats. Two processing plants have been confirmed as the source of the contaminated processed meats. Swaziland imports the processed meats from RSA, including from the implicated processing plants. As such, the Swazi consumer is also at risk of food poisoning from consuming the implicated processed meats.

Listeriosis is an infection caused by a bacterium called *Listeria monocytogenes*. Its common mode of transmission is through consumption of food contaminated with the listeria organism. Individuals at high risk of developing severe disease includes new-borns, elderly, pregnant women, immunocompromised individuals.

The most common signs and symptoms are; fever, flu-like illness, abortion in pregnant women. In newborns they may manifest by sepsis, meningitis and pneumonia. Among the elderly and immunocompromised it manifests by fever, diarrhoea, and vomiting, severe headache. Other signs can be neck stiffness, confusion and general weakness. Symptoms appear 3 - 70 days after the consumption of contaminated food. However, the incubation period is usually 3 weeks.

The Ministry of Health and Ministry of Agriculture have an obligation to protect the public as empowered by the Public Health Act 5/1969 and the Veterinary Public Health Act 17/2013.

RISK MITIGATION

1. Suspension of importation of all processed meats until further notice.
2. Immediate cancellation/withdrawal of all processed meat import permits issued.
3. Immediate suspension of retail of the processed meats until further notice.

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4. Recall of the implicated products from consumers back to the retailers of origin
5. Safe disposal of all the implicated products.

ADVICE TO THE PUBLIC/CONSUMERS

1. Stop the consumption of ready to eat meat products such as polony, vienna, sausages, and other cold meats.
2. Remove these products from your fridges and homes. Either return to the retailer of origin or safely dispose by burning or burying. Do not feed to pets.
3. Consume only thoroughly cooked meat.
4. Wash raw vegetables thoroughly before eating.
5. Practice good hygiene in the kitchen; wash your hands regularly, and make sure cutting boards, cutlery and crockery are cleaned properly.
6. Avoid raw (unpasteurized) milk or foods made from unpasteurized milk.
7. Separate raw food and ready to eat food during preparation and storage.

CONCLUSION

The Ministries of Agriculture and Health including municipalities have already met to operationalize the interventions. Currently no cases of listeriosis have been confirmed in the country. The situation is being closely monitored. The public is advised to seek medical attention as soon as the signs mentioned above are noticed. If the disease is found early, treatment is available in our health facilities.



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