



health

Department:
Health
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

MEDIA STATEMENT

To: Editors & Health Journalists
Issued by: Ministry of Health
Date: Friday, 16 March 2018

Minister of Health responds to RCL Foods Limited claims

The Minister of Health, Dr Aaron Motsoaledi, has noted the statement released by Rainbow Chicken Limited regarding the results of their independent laboratory investigation, and wishes to respond as follows:

We agree with RCL Foods Limited that the French laboratory they used for whole genome sequencing of *Listeria monocytogenes* isolates recovered from their Wolwehoek production facility is a reputable internationally recognised laboratory. This much was confirmed by the World Health Organization (WHO).

But, this is not the point. The point is that *L. monocytogenes* was recovered from the RCL Foods Wolwehoek plant, and this state of affairs has not changed since the press conference of 4th March 2018 held at the NICD premises and Sandringham.

We made it clear at the press conference that we only had results of whole genome sequencing for the Enterprise Foods Polokwane production facility. We further clarify that for the RCL Foods Wolwehoek production facility in Sasolburg, we only have results of culture so far and that 14% (28/201) of the environmental samples tested positive for *L. monocytogenes*. We are awaiting whole genome sequencing results which will be available early next week.

The results shared by RCL Foods do not, in anyway, change the fact that *Listeria* was found in the RCL Foods Wolwehoek production facility, from several areas of the production facility, including post-production areas which are a risk for product contamination.

Although 92% of the *L. monocytogenes* isolates recovered from patients since January 2017 are ST6 (the outbreak strain), we have identified at least 19 other sequence types of *L. monocytogenes* that have also caused sporadic disease in patients – but these non-ST6 cases have not been linked to any specific contaminated foods as yet.

We reiterate that the RCL announcement this morning reporting the whole genome sequencing results from the French laboratory doesn't in anyway alter the actions we as the Department of Health announced regarding their ready-to-eat processed meat products on 4th of March 2018. *Listeria monocytogenes* of any ST strain may pose a risk for human health.

Lastly, we wish to remind the public that the announcement we made about listeriosis does not relate to frozen or fresh chicken. This includes frozen or fresh chicken produced by RCL Foods. Our message is clear: **chicken products that need to be cooked (like frozen chicken, chicken nuggets, soups, eggs etc.) are not included in the recall and do not pose a risk provided they are handled properly and cooked properly.**

Our problem of listeriosis are **with ready-to-eat (RTE) processed meats or cold meat products**. Let there be no confusion about this fact.

-End-

Issued by the Ministry of Health

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