

Listeriosis outbreak traced to Enterprise Foods factory in Limpopo

 By [Lauren Hartzenberg](#)

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The source of the world's largest Listeriosis outbreak has been traced to an Enterprise Foods facility in Polokwane, Limpopo, Health Minister Aaron Motsoaledi announced on Sunday.



The cause of the outbreak strain ST6 was confirmed in 16 environmental samples collected from the Enterprise facility. The foods linked to the outbreak have been identified as Enterprise polony, smoked Russians and frankfurters, but Motsoaledi has urged the public to abstain from eating any ready-to-eat meat products.

“While we know that polony is definitely implicated, there is a risk of cross-contamination of other ready-to-eat processed meat products, either at production, distribution or retail. We advise members of the public to avoid all processed meat products that are sold as ready-to-eat,” said the Minister.

In addition to the Polokwane facility, another Enterprise facility located in Germiston, Gauteng, tested positive for *Listeria* but it is yet to be confirmed if it is the same ST6 strain. Enterprise Foods has confirmed that it is undertaking a full national recall on the Enterprise ready-to-eat meat products, and operations have been suspended at both the Polokwane and Germiston facilities, and supply to retailers has been halted. Enterprise Foods forms part of FMCG giant Tiger Brands.

A Rainbow Chicken Limited (RCL Foods) factory in the Free State also tested positive for Listeria, but samples from this facility are not the same strain that is causing the outbreak. The company has confirmed that its Wolwehoek processing plant has taken the precautionary measure to suspend all production of the Rainbow Polony brand. Additionally, it is in the process of recalling all Rainbow Polony products from its entire customer base.

"RCL Foods is continuing its detailed discussions and is working closely with representatives from the DoH, the Department of Agriculture, Forests and Fisheries (DAFF), and the National Institute of Communicable Diseases (NICD). RCL Foods is sharing all results from its testing, both internally and externally, with the relevant authorities," the company said in a statement.



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Product recalls

The department has issued the affected companies, Enterprise Foods and RCL Foods, with safety recall notices. National Consumer Commission deputy commissioner Thenzi Mabuza said that "companies would have to come up with a plan on how they would recall all products which they must present on Monday morning."

"They also need to let us know which other products were made in the factories and could have been contaminated by Listeria bacteria. They also need to say the time they are going to take to recall the product and the strategy of how consumers dispose of products."

Retailers have stated that they are in the process of withdrawing all products from the manufacturing sites identified by the Department of Health. Pick n Pay, Shoprite and Checkers shoppers are advised to return any Enterprise and Rainbow ready-to-eat products for a full refund.

"All Enterprise products - including the Bokkie, Renown, Lifestyle and Mieliekip brands - have already been recalled by the company concerned and we are urgently withdrawing them from our stores," said David North, group executive, strategy and corporate affairs, Pick n Pay Stores.

"In addition, all ready-to-eat products such as polony and Russian sausages manufactured at the Rainbow facility in Sasolburg are also being withdrawn. This action is taking place in all Pick n Pay and Boxer stores. In addition, as a precaution, Pick n Pay-branded chicken polony, manufactured by Rainbow, is also being withdrawn.

All fridges and food preparation areas in our stores will now be re-cleaned to prevent any cross-contamination. Recalled meat is being isolated and will be safely destroyed," North stated in a press release.



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Compromised individuals

The foodborne disease has claimed approximately 180 lives since January 2017, and more than 900 cases have been reported. Newborns, the elderly, pregnant women and their unborn babies, and immune-compromised individuals with HIV, diabetes, cancer and chronic liver or kidney disease are at a higher risk of being infected. Pregnant woman, in particular, may display no symptoms when being infected with the bacteria but can pass it onto their baby.

According to the department, Gauteng is still leading the pack with the number of Listeriosis cases at 60%, followed by 13% in the Western Cape and 7% in KwaZulu-Natal and others sporadically spread out across the country.

The following food safety precautions have been advised by the department:

Wash your hands before handling food or when coming back from the bathroom.

Cook food thoroughly.

Separate raw food from cooked food.

Store food at an appropriate temperature.

Wash uncooked food with clean running water.

Only use pasteurized or boiled milk products.

ABOUT LAUREN HARTZENBERG

Managing editor and retail editor at Bizcommunity.com Cape Town apologist. Dog mom. Get in touch: lauren@bizcommunity.com

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