

**OUTBREAK OF LISTERIOSIS IN SOUTH AFRICA**

The Red Meat Industry Forum has taken note with concern of the outbreak of listeriosis as reported by the Department of Health on 5 December 2017 which could be misleading with the large number of photos of livestock portrayed in media coverage thereof.

*Listeria monocytogenes* is the primary cause of the illness called listeriosis. This bacterium is widely distributed in nature and has been found in soil, water, sewage, mud, silage and decaying vegetation. It has been isolated from humans, a wide variety of healthy and diseased animals and birds, animal products, fresh produce such as vegetables and fruit, food packaging and processing environments.

**Listeriosis in Red Meat**

Although red meat is seldom a source of infection and although this bacterium is destroyed through proper cooking, the outbreak highlights the responsibility of the red meat industry to provide for proper and improved hygiene during the production, processing, packing and preparation of red meat and red meat products. It is also the responsibility of the consumer to ensure that cross contamination does not occur between cooked and raw products or from human hands and equipment. *Listeria* presents a particular concern in respect to food handling, because it can grow at refrigerator temperatures.

**Listeriosis awareness at the Abattoir**

During the processing of livestock to meat at the abattoir, particular attention is given to slaughter procedures, personnel hygiene and sterilization of equipment to minimize bacterial contamination during this process. Furthermore, meat inspection of each animal and carcass ensure the health of the animal and removal of any possible contamination that might have occurred. Microbiological testing of water, product, contact surfaces and hands is a prerequisite at a registered abattoir in terms of the Meat Safety Act, 2000 and supporting regulations.

It is therefore imperative that the consumer ensures that the meat they purchase is sourced only from registered abattoirs that have an Independent Meat Inspection Service and that once purchased the cold chain is maintained at all times; as well as to avoid eating raw or under cooked meat products.

**The World Health Organization's five keys to food safety:**

- Keep clean. Wash your hands before handling food and often during food preparation.
- Separate raw and cooked food. If you are handling or storing raw food, do not touch already cooked food unless you have already washed your hands and food preparation utensils.
- Cook food thoroughly. Food that does not usually need cooking before eating should be washed thoroughly with clean running water.
- Keep food at safe temperatures.
- Use safe water for domestic use at all times or boil before use.

The Red Meat Industry Forum remains committed to building and maintaining the positive image of South African red meat and red meat products as a healthy, nutritious and safe food choice which is sustainable in the long term while pledging its full support to the ongoing investigation into the source of the problem. All industry stakeholders are encouraged to review and strengthen their hygiene management systems thereby providing the consumer the peace of mind to offer her family the product of choice which is red meat.

Issued by  
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