

SA on back foot over listeriosis, Davies warns

By [Tamar Khan](#)

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The listeriosis outbreak has negatively affected trading partners' perceptions of the safety of food exports from SA and could have financial repercussions that extend far beyond the firms at the heart of the crisis, Trade and Industry Minister Rob Davies told Parliament on Wednesday.



"We have a significant reputational challenge which we now need to confront," he said.

"Recovering from incidents like this is a massive challenge for companies concerned. They need to embrace it with a spirit of transparency. The same applies to us as a country," he told a joint sitting of the portfolio committees on agriculture forestry and fisheries, health and trade and industry.

The outbreak is the worst in recorded history and has been responsible for 185 deaths since January 2017, says the Department of Health.

On 4 March the National Institute for Communicable Diseases identified *Listeria monocytogenes*, the bacteria that causes listeriosis, in ready-to-eat processed meats made by [Tiger Brands and RCL Foods](#).

The bacteria was found in samples of Tiger Brands' Enterprise polony and sausages and in polony made by RCL Foods. This prompted the National Consumer Commission to order product recalls and the Department of Agriculture Forestry and Fisheries to suspend their export certificates.

Tiger Brands has since also recalled its Snax products due to listeria contamination.



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SA annually exported sausages and similar products to the value of \$18m and exports of other prepared meat products averaged \$45m a year, Niki Kruger, the Department of Trade and Industry's chief director for international trade and economic development, told MPs.

While the exports of the affected products represented just 0.01% of SA's global exports, the listeriosis outbreak had already affected exports of other foodstuffs, she said. Rwanda had banned imports of South African dairy, meat, fruit and vegetables in December. Several other countries have banned the import of South African processed meat products, including Zambia, Malawi, Botswana and Namibia.

Determining how listeria had been introduced into production facilities was vital, said Davies. "The sooner we can come to some certainty about the common thread between the factories the better. If there is a listeria outbreak in another country traced back to SA we are in big, deep trouble," he said.

Davies blamed the industry for the lack of compulsory safety standards for processed meat products, saying business had pushed back against National Regulator for Compulsory Specifications' attempts to do so four years ago. The regulator referred the issue to the Department of Health, which has yet to craft legally binding safety standards for these products.



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Source: *Business Day*

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