

Expert calls for co-operation in listeriosis probe

A leading meat scientist has urged the companies implicated in SA's biggest recorded outbreak of listeriosis to collaborate in efforts to determine how their products became contaminated with deadly listeria bacteria.



More than 180 people have died in the outbreak since January 2017.

The outbreak was traced after scientists from the National Institute for Communicable Diseases found listeria in polony made by both Tiger Brands and RCL Foods at a Soweto creche, where several children took ill with listeriosis.

"Several of the ingredients used to make polony could potentially harbour listeria, but the bacteria could have been introduced into a factory from another source," said Louw Hoffman, chair of meat science at Stellenbosch University.

Tiger Brands said its polony was made from water, mechanically deboned chicken, soya protein, pork, tapioca starch, salt, dextrose, sucrose, irradiated spices, flavourings, onion, spice extracts, phosphates, monosodium glutamate, sodium erythorbate, garlic, colourant and the preservatives sodium nitrite and sodium nitrate.

RCL said its polony ingredients differed by variant, but the core ingredients included chicken meat, chicken skin and fat, spices, flavours, binding agents and water.

"I don't know if they will ever be able to find out where it comes from, but the question I would ask is what is the common

denominator between these companies," said Hoffman. "Neither one of them can afford it happening again," he added.

RCL had not responded to queries about industry co-operation by the time of publication.

Tiger Brands representative Nevashnee Naicker said the company had not formally engaged RCL so far but it supported an "industry-wide engagement" to co-ordinate responses to the outbreak.

"Our focus thus far has been on managing the crisis and the recall, ensuring that we minimise the risk to consumers and engaging with the local municipalities in Polokwane and Germiston. We have been working with the local and international experts who have been brought in to support our investigation efforts. Furthermore, the teams have been involved with deepcleaning interventions during the week," said Naicker.

On March 4 Health Minister Aaron Motsoaledi said that the strain of listeria responsible for most of the cases recorded since last January had been traced by the institute to Tiger Brands's Enterprise Foods factory in Polokwane, prompting an immediate recall of its products.

Listeria was also found in cold meat products made in its Germiston factory.

Source: *Business Day*

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