

Tiger Brands gives update on Listeria testing results

Tiger Brands has received two sets of independent laboratory testing results confirming the presence of *Listeria monocytogenes* in the physical plant environment at the Enterprise Foods Factory in Polokwane.



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The independent testing confirmed the findings of the Department of Health for the presence of ST6 strain of *Listeria monocytogenes* in the environment. In addition, there was a positive detection of *Listeria* ST6 (LST6) on the outer casing of two samples. Whether this presence of LST6 can be said to have caused any illness or death remains unclear at present and testing in that regard is an ongoing process likely to take time.

The Department of Health did not find the presence of *Listeria* in their product samples. Tiger Brands closed the Polokwane and Germiston Enterprise factories on 4 March 2018. These factories remain closed while they undertake efforts to understand how LST6 came into the factory. All of the Enterprise ready-to-eat meat products have been recalled and are no longer available for sale.

Test results from March

Tiger Brands continued extensive testing of its products and production facilities beyond Polokwane and Germiston and discovered the presence of very low levels of *Listeria* at the Pretoria meat processing factory. These results have been sent for whole genome sequencing to determine whether ST6 is present or not at the facility. The results will only become available in due course.

Although the level detected was well within the range of government standards for the presence of Listeria, Tiger Brands has taken the precautionary measure of closing the factory and has instituted a product recall of all Snax products manufactured at the Pretoria factory with immediate effect. In addition, we will be sending samples for genome sequencing to establish the specific strain of Listeria.

Given the suspension of operations at the Polokwane, Germiston and Pretoria sites, which are the primary recipients of the production of the company's Clayville abattoir, operations at the Clayville abattoir will be wound down with the objective of suspending operations completely at the end of March 2018.

Will not compromise on quality

"At Tiger Brands, we promised our stakeholders that we will not compromise on quality, safety and internal controls. These are values and principles that I have actively communicated since being appointed CEO 18 months ago. It is therefore devastating that despite this focus and ensuring that we more than meet legislated industry standards, test results show that Listeria ST6 has been found in the environment at our Polokwane facility. The Department of Health has reported that people have lost their lives as a result of Listeriosis and according to the Minister of Health, 90% of these are as a result of LST6. Although no link has, as yet, been confirmed between the presence of LST6 at our Polokwane plant and the loss of life I deeply regret any loss of life and I want to offer my heartfelt condolences to all those who have lost their loved ones. Any loss of life, no matter the circumstance, is tragic." says Lawrence Mac Dougall, CEO of Tiger Brands.

"We acknowledge that we are dealing with a national crisis and want to assure the public that in the event that a tangible link is established between our products and listeriosis illnesses or fatalities, Tiger Brands will take steps to consider and address any valid claims which may be made against it in due course."

"During this period of investigation and discovery, we have decided to be extra cautious and to take immediate precautionary action when traces of Listeria are detected where they are not expected. We are investing all our time and energy into not only understanding the cause of the LST6 detection but also how it could have come into our facility. Local and international experts are helping us put measures in place to prevent this happening again in any of our meat processing facilities. While every effort is being made to get to the bottom of this outbreak it will take time to complete our investigation."

Complex and global challenge

"Tiger Brands is working with a team comprising some of the world's leading local and international scientific experts in listeria management. Our Polokwane, Germiston and Pretoria factories are undergoing an extensive deep clean of all the equipment, machinery and some structural upgrades of the facilities with the view of ensuring that our facilities exceed the highest, best practice standards for meat processing facilities. We will continue to work closely with the Capricorn and Ekurhuleni Departments of Health as we progress with these remedial actions."

"Listeriosis is a complex and global challenge with increasing outbreaks and mortality rate caused by a variety of food sources. Other potential sources of listeria may well exist and hence a country-wide response is needed to address the tragic consequences of listeriosis. A sustainable national solution for South Africa will only be achievable through a collaborative multi-sectoral approach involving industry, government, regulators, scientific experts and civil society groupings."

"A key focus will need to be reviewing and revising the current standards to take into consideration the unique South African context. Tiger Brands would like to be at the forefront and play a leading role in this initiative," Dougall concluded.