

Group Email

SASTM NEWSFLASH**LISTERIOSIS - SOUTH AFRICA: FATAL, INCREASING INCIDENCE, ST6**

Cooked chicken and other deli meats such as ham and Bologna sausage are high on the list of suspects for causing the world's worst ever recorded listeriosis outbreak.

At least 81 people have died in the ongoing outbreak in South Africa, according to the country's National Institute of Communicable Diseases (NICD), with the number of recorded cases now 767 spread across all 9 provinces. It is massively larger than the 2nd biggest outbreak, which took place in the United States in 2011, when 147 cases were reported.

The disease, contracted from eating food contaminated with the foodborne pathogen *Listeria*, normally has a mortality rate of between 20-25%. However, the NICD has said "outcome data" from the 235 cases that it has studied has put the death rate at 34%.

It said that so far, no food sources contaminated with the outbreak strain had been found, including among poultry and poultry products.

Earlier this month [January 2018], there had been speculation that one of South Africa's major poultry producers, Sovereign Foods, based at Hartbeespoort in the Eastern Cape, could be involved in the outbreak.

Environmental health officers visited Sovereign Foods' abattoirs to collect food samples, but these samples did not pick up the ST6 strain, although the tests found other strains with the potential to cause disease.

South Africa's Health Minister Aaron Motsoaledi said that as the abattoir had *Listeria*, the abattoir was prohibited from further preparing food pending a deep clean. The abattoir was closed on 22 Dec 2017 but reopened on 9 Jan [2018]. Blaine van Rensburg, Sovereign Foods' head of production, said the company was further strengthening steps to render products safer than "they already are."

Food safety experts Dr Lucia Anelich said the "culprit" was most likely a product consumed "extremely often" across the country. "Deli meats are obviously consumed by a wide variety of people in the population, whether it's a cheaper cut or a more expensive one," she said.

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When last reported by ProMED-mail fatal, increasing incidence, ST6, there were a total of 748 laboratory-confirmed listeriosis cases, including 67 deaths. Now there are 767 nationally, including 81 deaths.

Previous ProMED-mail posts said that molecular typing identified ST6 in over 90 percent of clinical isolates from all 9 provinces, which supports the current working hypothesis of a single source of food contamination causing the outbreak, i.e. a single widely consumed food product, or multiple food products produced at a single facility.

However, no ST6 food/environmental isolates have been identified to date, and the source of this outbreak remains unknown.

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