



MINISTRY OF HEALTH



Listeriosis

7th December 2017

The public is hereby **informed** about the recent Listeriosis outbreak announced by the Republic of South African authorities. Listeriosis is a serious bacterial infection caused by the rod-shaped bacteria *listeria monocytogenes*. The infection incubates between 3 and 70 days with case-fatality rate of around 20%-30% in recent outbreaks and sporadic cases.

Listeria bacteria are **found** in the environment such as in water and soil. This means that animals and vegetables can become contaminated at any time and as a result, anyone can get listeriosis. The bacterium is spread when people eat food contaminated with the bacterium. The most common foods to be likely contaminated are raw or unpasteurised milk as well as soft cheeses, vegetables, processed foods, ready-to-eat meats and smoked fish products.

Signs and symptoms in healthy adults are usually mild and may include fever, nausea, and diarrhoea. It may also cause mild to severe gastroenteritis. In pregnant women, listeriosis can result in a miscarriage or stillbirth, premature delivery, meningitis in the newborn – leading to permanent disability. In high-risk patients, the spread of the infection to the nervous system can cause meningitis leading to headaches and confusion, a stiff neck and convulsions or septicaemia.

Listeriosis is usually **diagnosed** when a bacterial culture grows *Listeria monocytogenes* from a body tissue or fluid, such as blood, spinal fluid, or the placenta. Listeriosis that causes gastroenteritis does not require **treatment**. However, meningitis or septicaemia as a result of listeria can be life-threatening and should be treated with intravenous antibiotics.

The Ministry of Health urges all people travelling to the affected country to be cautious. The public is further advised to take precautions on the consumption of milk and milk products, ensure they eat well cleaned vegetables, avoid readily dried meat, smoked fish products and clean hands appropriately. The Ministry of Health requests anyone who may have travelled to affected places, or who may have the signs and symptoms indicated to seek health services from nearest health facility providing the clinician with clear travel and consumption history.