

LISTERIOSIS: DEADLY SERIOUS

South Africa made the front pages of world news with the largest Listeria food-borne outbreak ever recorded in human history. Tragically it left 180 people dead and about a thousand cases of infections.

Traced to manufacturing facilities of Enterprise and Rainbow brands of processed meats in Polokwane and the Free State respectively, polony was identified as a definite source of the L monocytogenes ST6 bacteria. Other products such as viennas, russians, frankfurters, sausages and cold meats could also be affected due to the risk of cross-contamination.

Processed meats are a staple and affordable source of protein for many South Africans and represents a massive market. Polony on bread goes further and is cheaper than fresh meat options for school and work lunch-boxes. The products are the base ingredients for our famous South African all-in-one sandwich meals of the “kota” and “gatsby”.

With this market segment worth several billion rand and the highly competitive business of production at lower costs, manufacturers turn to a meat by-product known as Mechanically Deboned Meat (MDM) or Mechanically Reclaimed/Recovered Meat (MRM) including Mechanically Separated Meat (MSM). Rendered into a paste form and supplied at a fraction of the price of meat, it is commonly referred to as “pink slime” and “white slime”. It is used as an extender in bulking up processed meat products. (Click here for further reading - http://www.sanha.org.za/hgazette/23/Halaal_Gazette_23.html). Some 12 million kilograms of imported MDM was imported in December 2017 alone.

Given the appalling state of the Brazilian meat industry fraught with fraud and irregularities reported widely in the world media and in the Halaal Gazette, and reinforced by further revelations of arrests a few days ago on cover up of unhygienic conditions, there is a strong belief and speculation by scientists that the white slime could be the most likely cause of the Listeria outbreak. It appears as if this was an accident waiting to happen.

If indeed, the imported Brazilian “white slime” is found to be the cause of the outbreak, then most certainly the Muslim community and the broader Halaal processed meat industry will be exposed since this imported raw material is extensively used in the manufacture of Halaal processed meat products.

Halaal Dietary Law is an all-encompassing Divine regulation which not only governs the legal status of permissibility or otherwise of a food item but also focuses on issues of hygiene and public health safety. A food items prepared according to Halaal procedures would be rendered Haraam (unlawful) if it is determined to be hazardous and injurious to human health. Halaal is thus an all-encompassing standard and cannot be dismissed as a simple matter of food safety when lives are lost. A single death is one death too many.

We urge all stakeholders to take a lesson from this incident and let’s do everything in our capacity to strive towards procuring, preparing and serving humanity with clean, wholesome, nutritious food, a basic right that we’re all entitled to.

DEATH STIRS THE LIVING

ABOUT LISTERIOSIS

WHAT IS IT?

Listeria is a hardy bacterium that is naturally found in the environment. It can survive for months and even years in an environment such as a meat-processing plant and go on to contaminate meat through the various steps in the manufacturing facility. It commonly occurs in soil, water, vegetation, human and animal faeces, sewage, effluent from poultry and meat processing plants. It can contaminate a wide variety of food types, including meat and meat products, dairy products (unpasteurised and pasteurised), fresh and frozen produce (fruits, vegetables and sprouts) and ready-to-eat products.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS

After ingestion the bacteria can survive in the body for a long time. Onset of illness can be between one and seventy days with the average period being three weeks.

Symptoms include fever, muscle aches and gastrointestinal problems such as nausea, vomiting and diarrhea. If the infection has spread to the central nervous system, more worrying symptoms will occur, such as headache, stiff neck, confusion, seizures and the person may go into a coma.

In pregnant women, infection can lead to miscarriage, stillbirth and newborn infections.

WHO IS AT HIGH RISK

People with weakened immune systems, such as the elderly, those on cancer treatment or medications that suppress the immune system, pregnant women, newborn babies, liver disease, alcoholism and diabetes.

PREVENTION

- Do not drink raw (unpasteurized) milk, and do not eat foods that have unpasteurized milk in them.
- Wash hands, knives, countertops, and cutting boards after handling and preparing uncooked foods.
- Rinse raw produce thoroughly under running tap water before eating.
- Keep uncooked meats, poultry, and seafood separate from vegetables, fruits, cooked foods and ready-to-eat foods.
- Thoroughly cook raw food from animal sources, such as meat, poultry, or seafood to a safe internal temperature.
- Consume perishable and ready-to-eat foods as soon as possible.

Any queries pertaining to the above or any other aspect of Halaal may be referred to our offices

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