

# Article on Listeriosis

On the 4th of December 2017, the Department of Health through the National Institute for Communicable Diseases (NICD) issued a report of cases of a disease called listeriosis. The report mentioned that there were people hospitalised and in some instances, people who have died as a result of the disease in Johannesburg. As of 29 November 2017, a total of 557 laboratory-confirmed listeriosis cases have been reported from all provinces since 01 January 2017. Most cases have been reported from Gauteng Province (62% or 345/557) followed by Western Cape (13%, 71/557) and KwaZulu-Natal (7%, 37/557) provinces.

## **So, what is listeriosis?**

*Listeriosis is a disease caused by a bug called *Listeria monocytogenes* (“the bug”), which is a **bacterium** commonly found in moist environments, soil, surface water, silage and decaying vegetation. It can infect both humans and animals. In infected chickens, the bug can be found in meat and intestines.*

## **What actions are taken by poultry producers to reduce the threat of listeriosis?**

The industry uses a number of measures to prevent infection of poultry with *Listeria monocytogenes* thus ensuring that the risk of food borne outbreaks as a result of the consumption of poultry are minimised. Some of these measures are:

1. Routine cleaning and disinfection of poultry houses to reduce the number of bacteria in the environment;
2. Decontamination of the litter and equipment utilized in these facilities to prevent the introduction of diseases into the facilities;
3. Treatment of the drinking water used to prevent infection via contaminated surface water;
4. Implementation of disease surveillance programs to ensure the early detection of diseases in the flocks; and,
5. Following strict hygienic conditions guided by the Meat Safety Act and other related legislation and standards during the slaughter of poultry and production of further processed poultry products.

## **What do people need to do to avoid contracting the disease?**

1. Wash your hands after using ablutions facilities.
2. Wash your hands and preparation surfaces before handling food to prevent contamination and cross contamination of food due to improper sanitation of food handling areas and poor food handling practices.
3. In the home it is good practice to clean surfaces and utensils after the handling of each food type e.g. clean the kitchen counter after handling fruit and vegetables prior to cutting cooked meat.
4. Wash the surface and utensils after cutting raw meat and prior to handling any foods that will not be cooked after preparation on the same surface.

5. The bacterium is sensitive to high temperatures, so food should be cooked properly to destroy the bacteria.
6. The organism can also grow in some prepared foods kept at low temperatures so it is important to cook food properly even after storing at a low temperature or consume leftover refrigerated food as soon as possible.
7. In the retail and deli environment poor food handling and sanitation practices can lead to the transfer of *Listeria monocytogenes* to ready to eat meat and poultry products. It is thus advisable that members of the public purchase these products from reputable outlets.

**What should one do if they suspect that they may have contracted a stomach bug?**

1. Consult your doctor, go to the hospital or local clinic as soon as possible so that treatment can be started without any delays.