Listeria monocytogenes is the primary cause of the illness called listeriosis. This bacterium is widely distributed in nature and has been found in soil, water, sewage, mud, silage and decaying vegetation. It has been isolated from humans, a wide variety of animals and birds, animal products, fresh produce such as vegetables and fruit, food packaging and processing environments. The RMIF is therefore of the opinion that there is no single, simple answer as other recent cases in Australia have emanated from the consumption of melons; with maybe more virulent Listeria strains emerging.

Consequently the RMIF has requested all relevant information relating to the tests conducted by the National Department of Health and the NICD as referred to in the media release to determine the exact nature and ambit of the testing conducted. The RMIF had to drag government to court on several occasions to implement independent meat inspection services, which should have been adopted some 18 years ago in terms of the Meat Safety Act, 2000. It was only under the threat of contempt of court did government exceed to the RMIF’s demands to implement independent meat inspection services.

The outbreak has emphasised the responsibility of the Red Meat Industry deeply concerned that the entire processed meat industry has been implicated without justification. The devastating consequences emanating from the media coverage thus far as a result of the Minister’s media release has had far reaching and catastrophic impact on the processed meat industry and the Red Meat Industry in its entirety.
together with other food industries to provide for proper and improved hygiene during the production, processing, packing and preparation of red meat and red meat products. Red Meat Industry stakeholders are closely engaging the relevant authorities to improve microbiological criteria, processes and standards. This is based on key learning currently developing and taking coordinated actions in all sectors of the red meat value chain relating to food safety activities to ensure that safe food is provided to the Consumer.

Whilst Industry is responsible for producing food that is safe for human consumption, it is also the responsibility of Consumers not to content themselves, that the only contamination can come from the facilities implicated, but to adopt basic hygienic practices when buying, transporting food home, preparing and storing food to protect their health and to ensure that cross contamination does not occur between cooked and raw products or from human hands and equipment. Listeria presents a particular concern in respect to food handling, because it can multiply at refrigerator temperatures.

During the processing of livestock to meat at the abattoir, particular attention is given to slaughter procedures, personnel hygiene and sterilisation of equipment to minimise bacterial contamination during this process. Furthermore, meat inspection of each animal and carcass ensure the health of the animal and removal of any possible contamination that might have occurred. Microbiological testing of water, product, contact surfaces and hands is a prerequisite at a registered abattoir in terms of the Meat Safety Act, 2000 and supporting regulations.

It is therefore imperative that Consumers ensure that the meat they purchase is sourced only from registered abattoirs that have an Independent Meat Inspection Service and that once purchased the cold chain is maintained at all times; as well as to avoid eating raw or under cooked meat products.

Various experts have confirmed that microbiological analysis of fresh meat is of lesser consequence and risk to the Consumer and that more attention should be given to ready-to-eat products that are not subject to heat treatment in its preparation.

The Foodstuff, Cosmetics and Disinfectants Act, 1976 under the mandate of the Department of Health states that the sale, manufacture and importation of food that is unfit for human consumption is prohibited, but the Act should be supported by the appropriate regulations. As things stand there are no regulated requirements for the testing of Listeria monocytogenes in ready-to-eat foods in South Africa. SAMPA members adhere to all guidelines of the Department including the current SANS885 standard, a national compositional and microbiological standard which forms the basis for Consumer protection, health and safety in the meat processing industry.

The Red Meat Industry Forum members together with the South African Meat Processors Association remain committed to strengthening the national food control systems to ensure that healthy, nutritious and safe South African red meat and red meat products is sustainably supplied to the Consumer and again pledges its full support to the competent authority and its ongoing investigation. The RMIF also urges for close cooperation between the respective departments in establishing food safety guidelines and to utilise the opportunities to interact with Industry on the forums provided. All industry stakeholders are encouraged to review and strengthen their hygiene management systems to provide the Consumer with the peace of mind to offer her family the product of choice which is red meat.

The World Health Organisation’s keys to food safety:

- Keep clean. Wash your hands before handling food and often during food preparation.
- Separate raw and cooked food. If you are handling or storing raw food, do not touch already cooked food unless you have already washed your hands and food preparation utensils.
- Ensure that working surfaces are cleaned before using for different food types.
- Cook food thoroughly. Food that does not usually need cooking before eating should be washed thoroughly with clean running water.
- Keep food at safe temperatures.
- Use safe water for domestic use at all times or boil before use.
According to Corder, the maintenance of clean working environments is essential when producing, handling or preparing food – from farms to kitchens, pathogens can easily be transferred between food handlers, equipment, surfaces and the food itself. The best way to avoid cross-contamination is to properly clean and sanitise all surfaces that might come into contact with foods.

"Cleaning manuals that are centered around Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points (HACCP) principles should be readily available for staff," she adds. "These should include detailed information regarding cleaning techniques, appropriate equipment and color coding to prevent cross contamination. Personal hygiene, and most importantly hand-washing, is also critical to minimise risk."

"In the wake of the Listeriosis outbreak, it is important for food industry professionals to ask themselves if they are doing all they can to ensure hygiene levels are maintained within their facilities," says Corder. "If they are in any doubt they should consult with industry experts for guidance."

She recommends seeking the advice of experts in cleaning equipment, materials and the provision of commercial cleaning who should be able to assist with the implementation of cleaning processes and methodologies that cater to a business’s individual needs whilst ensuring that they are in keeping with legislative priorities.
Rainbow Chicken polony cleared of deadly listeria bacteria

The national health department has confirmed the listeria bacteria found at the Rainbow Chicken polony factory is not the ST6 strain that caused 91% of cases.

Rainbow Chicken polony cleared of deadly listeria bacteria

The National Institute for Communicable Diseases completed the whole genome sequencing of the strains taken from the RCL factory in Wolwehoek, Free State, this week.

“This corroborates the results reported by RCL Foods at a French laboratory,” read a health ministry statement.

The fact that the Rainbow Chicken RCL factory does not have the strain that caused most of the 183 deaths, means that the case against Tiger Brands Enterprise’s factory even stronger, according to a NICD expert.

The deadly strain ST6 bacteria was found in 26 places in the Tiger Brands Polokwane Enterprise factory and on the outside of two rolls of polony.

Head of the Centre for Enteric Diseases at the National Institute for Communicable Diseases Dr Juno Thomas said: “The fact that we haven’t found the ST6 listeria monocytogenes strain in retail Rainbow polony or in the RCL foods production facility adds further strength to the findings that it is the Enterprise facility that is causing the outbreak.”

Tiger Brands gives update on Listeria testing results

Tiger Brands has received two sets of independent laboratory testing results confirming the presence of Listeria at its ready-to-eat chilled process meat production facilities...

Rainbow Chicken, whose polony was also recalled, still had other strains of listeria bacteria in its polony and in its factory, which can make people sick and require corrective action and monitoring, health spokesman Popo Maja said.

Lawyer Richard Spoor is expected to file class action papers against Tiger Brands within days to sue them on behalf of many families who lost loved ones and survivors who were disabled by the disease. He is finalising the papers.

He told TimesLive previously he will argue that the deadly outbreak was from a single source, the Tiger Brands Enterprise factory. – bizcommunity
We need rules

By Michael Acott

Food safety expert Dr Lucia Anelich says the listeriosis outbreak in South Africa has shown the urgent need for appropriate microbiological regulations for processed meats.

In an explanation about Listeria and listeriosis, she highlights that South Africa has no enforceable regulation on the maximum amount of Listeria monocytogenes permitted in ready-to-eat (RTE) foods. As a result, many food-processing companies seek instead to abide by international regulations.

Listeria monocytogenes is the bacterium that, when present at high levels in food, can result in the disease listeriosis. It can grow in cold conditions, but is killed by cooking and pasteurization. The government has identified a strain of Listeria monocytogenes as the cause of the listeriosis outbreak in this country.

"Unfortunately, while South Africa has strict regulations on Salmonella and E. coli, there is no set maximum for the amount of Listeria monocytogenes that is permitted in RTE food. There is only a guideline – the South African National Standard (SANS) 885 for processed meats. This guideline is voluntary and is not an enforceable regulation," Anelich says.

"Many South African food processors, therefore, seek to abide by international regulations and requirements on Listeria monocytogenes.

"Given the recent outbreak of listeriosis, the Department of Health should regard developing appropriate microbiological regulations for processed meats as an urgent priority."

Ubiquitous nature

Anelich also says that~

Listeria monocytogenes is present nearly everywhere in the environment – in soil and water, rotting vegetation, in our gardens and similar places.

It can, therefore, be expected realistically in/on crops (fruit and vegetables) that are grown in the field and on animals and poultry that are reared in the same environment in which Listeria monocytogenes "lives" naturally.

In low numbers, it is not regarded as a threat to human health, but at high levels it becomes a risk to humans, particularly the elderly, infants, pregnant women and those with compromised immune systems.

"Listeria monocytogenes can contaminate fruit and vegetables, meat and dairy products. That is why hygiene is so important whenever food is stored, processed, prepared or sold," she says.

SA on back foot over listeriosis

By Tamar Khan

The listeriosis outbreak has negatively affected trading partners' perceptions of the safety of food exports from SA and could have financial repercussions that extend far beyond the firms at the heart of the crisis, Trade and Industry Minister Rob Davies told Parliament.

"We have a significant reputational challenge which we now need to confront," he said.

"Recovering from incidents like this is a massive challenge for companies concerned. They need to embrace it with a spirit of transparency. The same applies to us as a country," he told a joint sitting of the portfolio committees on agriculture and forestry to order product recalls and the Department of Health.

The outbreak is the worst in recorded history and has been responsible for 185 deaths since January 2017, says the Department of Health.

On 4 March the National Institute for Communicable Diseases identified Listeria monocytogenes, the bacteria that causes listeriosis, in ready-to-eat processed meats made by Tiger Brands and RCL Foods.

The bacteria was found in samples of Tiger Brands’ Enterprise polony and sausages and in polony made by RCL Foods. This prompted the National Consumer Commission to order product recalls and the Department of Agriculture Forestry and Fisheries to suspend their export certificates.

Tiger Brands has since also recalled its Snax products due to listeria contamination.

SA annually exported sausages and similar products to the value of $18m and exports of other prepared meat products averaged $45m a year, Niki Kruger, the Department of Trade and Industry’s chief director for international trade and economic development, told MPs.

While the exports of the affected products represented just 0.01% of SA’s global exports, the listeriosis outbreak had already affected exports of other foodstuffs, she said. Rwanda had banned imports of South African dairy, meat, fruit and vegetables in December. Several other countries have banned the import of South African processed meat products, including Zambia, Malawi, Botswana and Namibia.

Determining how listeria had been introduced into production facilities was vital, said Davies. "The sooner we can come to some certainty about the common thread between the factories the better. If there is a listeria outbreak in another country traced back to SA we are in big, deep trouble," he said.

Davies blamed the industry for the lack of compulsory safety standards for processed meat products, saying business had pushed back against National Regulator for Compulsory Specifications’ attempts to do so four years ago. The regulator referred the issue to the Department of Health, which has yet to craft legally binding safety standards for these products.
Disinfect food naturally with Ultra Violet light, a chlorine free alternative

Retailers and food manufacturers are facing an unprecedented food safety crisis. Lives of their consumers are at stake. Consumers are also kicking back at the use of chemicals on the food they eat.

The solution
Of all the solutions available for eliminating pathogens in their processing operations and on their products and packaging, ultra-violet light is proving to be one of the safest, efficient and cost-effective options.

Best of all, it is chemical-free. Invisible ultra-violet light is best known for the UV-A and UV-B wavelengths (The ones that generate sun tans). The bacteria killing UV-C frequency however, is filtered out by the earth’s atmosphere.

UV-C eliminates surface bacteria, viruses and moulds by penetrating their membranes and attacking their DNA, killing them instantly. Its powerful UV rays have been used for decades in hospitals to kill airborne pathogens like TB. These days UV is finding increasing favour in the food and beverage industry to disinfect products like meats, spices, vegetables, soft fruits, seeds and nuts.

Technilamp is the leading supplier of UV-C in South Africa. With nearly 40 years experience in light-wave technology, it holds the franchise in SA for Philips lamps. While the initial business was in hospitals, they have found a very receptive audience in the food industry since installing their first UV-C germicidal solution in an export-focussed soft-fruit packer six years ago.

Your solution
Technilamp has a full range of off-the-shelf UV-C products, but also develops customised solutions for specific applications.

For example, they have developed an application to disinfect both the top and bottom of conveyors. They can design for disinfection whether at the time of pre-packing, during the actual packing process or prior to sealing the contents of the pack.

UV-C extends shelf-life
UVC is completely harmless to the product being treated. It has no effect on taste. But it does improve shelf-life and Technilamp has had some notable successes in the bakery sector using UV-C to extend freshness. It can also be used across multiple applications, not just for disinfecting air and food. Packaging lines and consumables such as PET bottles and caps can also be treated as well as work surfaces.

Cost-effective
There is now a more cost-effective and maintenance-free system for surface and air sterilization on a 24 X 7 basis that is environmentally friendly.

Once commissioned, only power consumption and annual lamp replacement costs are incurred.

For more information and quotes call Hylton Cowie: 
011-621-0620
h.cowie@technilamp.co.za
www.technilmamp.co.za

Technilamp