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Recent challenges posed by the outbreak of Listeriosis in South Africa: Lessons from this incidence

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The recent outbreak of listeriosis in South Africa was the largest in the world in recent times. As a researcher who has done work on the foodborne pathogen I found that the lack of knowledge about the pathogen led to its vast spread around the country. More than 980 cases were reported and 183 fatalities were reported by the National Institute for Communicable Diseases (NICD). Initially the source of the listeriosis outbreak was not known. It was eventually reported by South Africa's Minister of Health that the source of outbreak of listeriosis was identified. The three food processing factories were found to be the three sources of listeriosis outbreak. The processed ready to eat meat products were the source of listeriosis. The investigations took more than a year to determine the source of the outbreak. The ready-to-eat meat processed meat products that were found to be the carriers of listeriosis from the affected factories were polonies, viennas, Russians and all other 'cold meats'. What I have learnt from this incidence was the slow response for all the role players in food safety and environmental health. We did not respond immediately when the outbreak occurred. The listeriosis was not a notifiable disease like in other countries. It was only made notifiable recently after more than 176 deaths were reported. Other lessons learnt from this outbreak is that hygiene education, food safety, and public health is very crucial and should start from the household to the community at large.

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