



health

Department:
Health
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



MEDIA STATEMENT

To: Editors & Health Journalists

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World Food Safety Day Commemoration: 7 June 2022

Pretoria: South Africa joins the rest of the global community to commemorate the World Food Safety Day which aims to transform food systems to deliver better health sustainably and prevent foodborne diseases such as Listeriosis.

This day also provides an opportunity to strengthen efforts to ensure that the food we consume is safe and reduce the burden of foodborne illnesses globally, and this year the day is commemorated under the theme: “**Safer Food, better health**” which serves as a clarion call for everyone to join the campaign to ensure safe food for all.

Food safety is closely linked to many other Sustainable Development Goals, including economic growth, innovation, responsible consumption and production and climate change. In South Africa, food safety remains a shared responsibility and everyone’s business to prevent avoidable health risks, hence it is regulated by various governmental bodies.

Thus, the government calls upon everyone to join forces and practice food safety awareness. The Department of Health is responsible for ensuring that foodstuffs are safe for human consumption in terms of the Foodstuffs, Cosmetics and Disinfectant Act which addresses the manufacture, labelling, sale and importation of foodstuffs.

On the other hand, the Department of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development (DALRRD) is responsible for ensuring food safety in agricultural inputs such as animal feed and fertilizers, on farms and at abattoirs and meat imports, while the National Regulator for Compulsory Specification (NRCS) is responsible for regulating fish and other seafood and canned meat as assigned, by the Minister of Health.

The World Health Organization published the first estimates on the global burden of foodborne disease in 2015, indicating that annually, unsafe food causes 600 million cases and 42 000 deaths, but concedes that there is massive under-reporting.

Foodborne diseases arise due to contamination by chemicals, viruses, bacteria and parasites, but food safety and hygiene protocols remain the best preventative methods to improve food safety systems and ensure that food is safe to eat. However, this requires sustained investment in several areas, from stronger regulation associated

with good compliance and enforcement, to better laboratories, more stringent surveillance and better training and education.

Although, there was no evidence that COVID-19 is transmitted through food, food containers or packaging, but the pandemic has sharpened the focus on food safety-related issues, such as hygiene, antimicrobial resistance, zoonotic diseases, climate change, food fraud and the potential benefits of digitalizing food control systems.

South Africa participates in the Joint FAO/WHO Codex Alimentarius Commission, which is an international food safety organization established to develop global standards and guidance to protect the health of consumers and facilitate fair trade in food.

The Department of Health, through Food Control Directorate develops food safety, labelling and enhanced health and nutrition legislation, and is also coordinating and responding to food safety emergencies or crises such as international notifications requiring action or industry notifications of food recalls due to potential food safety hazards in line with the WHO International Health Regulations.

As part of ongoing efforts by government to protect the consumers and provide communities with healthier environments, the Environmental Health Practitioners conduct routine inspections at food business operators such as manufacturers, restaurants and supermarkets for health compliance, food storage practices and food handling practices. They also conduct training and awareness activities to food handlers, especially in the informal sector as well as community level.

Thus, consumers having concerns with the safety or food labelling are urged to report these to their nearest municipalities.

The National Environmental Health section has developed Norms and Standards, and audits the municipalities against these and is respond to respond to any outbreak of foodborne illness.

As we review our policies and legislation, there is a need for robust monitoring, improved surveillance and detection and rapid response capabilities for food safety emergencies and foodborne disease outbreaks. All these are imperative to protect the health and well-being of South Africa's population from foodborne diseases, communicable and non-communicable diseases.

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