

THE ROLE OF ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH IN FOOD SAFETY INCIDENTS AND FOOD PRODUCT RECALLS



FOOD SAFETY INCIDENTS AND FOOD PRODUCT RECALLS



NATIONAL DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH



ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

05 JUNE 2024



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PURPOSE



- As part of cooperative governance Environmental health has a significant role to play in responding to Food Safety and, Food safety incidences and outbreaks.
- To provide support and be part of the celebration on World Food Safety Day 2024 under the theme “ *Food Safety: prepare for the unexpected*”
- To outline the role of the national office in responding to an outbreak.
- To outline the role and responsibility of Environmental Health in Foodborne illness incidence, investigation and food product recalls.



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Legislation Framework



a) The National Health Act (Act 61 of 2003)

Section 3 (1) (c) of the Act, gives the Minister of Health the responsibility to, within the limits of available resources determine the policies and measures necessary to protect, promote and maintain the health of the population.

In addition, the Act empowers the Director General: Health, to:

- Ensure the implementation of national health policy in so far as it relates to the national department [section 21, (1) (a)].
- Issue guidelines for the implementation of national health policy [section 21, (1) (b)].
- Issue, and promote adherence to, norms and standards on health matters [section 21, (2) (b)].
- Coordinate health and medical services during national disasters [section 21, (2) (e)].
- Facilitate and promote the provision of health services for the management, prevention and control of communicable and non-communicable diseases [section 21, (2)(k)].



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Establishment of an Outbreak Response Team



The National, Provincial and District Departments of Health together with District Municipalities should establish and sustain well constituted and well-functioning outbreak response teams.

The overall aim of the outbreak response teams is to:

- Identify infectious disease outbreaks by ensuring the existence of a functional surveillance system
- Prepare for and investigate outbreaks wherever they occur
- Prepare adequately and timeously for emergencies and ensure rapid response and systematic management of outbreaks, in order to reduce morbidity, and mortality



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The roles of EH at National level



- Activate the Internal Coordinating Structure.
- Ensure revision of Terms of Reference.
- Identification of Possible stakeholders to be part of the response team.
- Develop a response plan and communicate.
- Activate blitz activities in all Provinces
- Conduct media Interviews with media houses.
- Coordinate the response to Media and Parliamentary Question.
- Status Quo report generated.
- Monitor the response plan and ensure to ultimately identify the source of the food poisoning cases and prevent the spread thereof.
- To ensure that law and order is not compromised during the response period.
- **Develop a reporting template and share to provinces and Municipalities.**



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Key points to be determined using the FBI template



- **TNOSS> Total Number of Spaza Shops/tuck shops**
 - ❖ Create a data base with all the trade names, addresses, and persons responsible.
 - ❖ To ensure that we respond to public queries requiring that we indicate the number of spaza shops in the country and all related matters.
- **TSIP/CC>Traders Selling Illegal Pesticides/ Controlled Chemicals.**
 - ❖ The selling of illegal pesticides or controlled chemical in a premise not accredited or certified to.
 - ❖ To ensure that we identify the source and entry point of these banned pesticides so that we can control its supply and distribution.
- **PUIP> Premises using Illegal Pesticides**
 - ❖ These would be premises using illegal pesticides for vector control purposes which will have adverse health effects on human being.
 - ❖ To verify if these pesticides are not used in a manner that they may contaminate food products as users try to control pests in the premises.
 - ❖ To determine to suppliers and track the entry point.



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Key points to be determined using the FBI template



- **TFBC> Total number of Food Borne illness Cases reported.**
 - ❖ To capture all cases reported.
 - ❖ All suspect cases to be reported.
- **IFPF> Illegal Food production Facilities**
 - ❖ These would be illegal manufacturing plants, production sites or any other place producing consumables illegally without certification for the premises or products and could also be producing illicit goods.
- **SSC> Total number of Spaza Shops Closed.**
 - ❖ Legislation is clear that a CoA is a prerequisite to operate a food premise.
- **TCC> Total number of Confirmed cases.**
 - ❖ Most Cases will be reported as Foodborne Illnesses and not confirmed as such. It is critical to record Confirmed cases because that will give the accurate status of the outbreak.
 - ❖ All laboratory confirmed cases.



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FBI outbreak 23OCT23- 14FEB24



Provinces	NUMBER OF REPORTED CASE	CASES CONFIRMED	Number of deaths reported
EASTERN CAPE	49	32	
FREE STATE	87	0	1
GAUTENG	858	10	10
LIMPOPO	93	0	
MPUMALANGA	136	0	
NORTHERN CAPE	0	0	
NORTHWEST	0	0	
KWAZULU NATAL	139	0	
WESTERN CAPE	37	22	
TOTAL	1399	964	11



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Core Outbreak Response Team



- Communicable Disease Control (including EPI, Malaria, TB, HIV, STI, etc)
- Surveillance
- Epidemiology and Information Systems
- **Laboratory**
- **Environmental Health, including Port Health**
- Health Promotion
- Clinical Care
- Infection Control

However, there are additional members that are critical and should be part of the overall outbreak response team, and these are: Finance, Pharmacy, Communications, Hospital Management, Emergency Medical Services\Disaster Management, Primary Health Care (PHC) etc.



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Role and Responsibilities Of the response team



It is very critical for the participating units, organizations and individuals to clearly understand their roles and responsibilities.

As a result, Terms of Reference should be agreed upon and every member should honor them.

- To contribute to the preparation of the plan of action and response that has been costed to allow for appropriate resource allocations
- To mobilize human, material and financial resources.
- To provide information and education to the general public before, during and after outbreaks
- To monitor the implementation of outbreak control actions
- To monitor resource utilization (drugs, vaccines, supplies, disinfectants, logistics, human and financial resources)
- To verify and confirm any rumour of disease outbreak at all levels
- To carry out outbreak investigation
- To recommend appropriate strategies and measures for the rapid containment of outbreak
- To coordinate the implementation of the plan of action and participate actively in the implementation and control strategies
- To provide technical support to the health facilities during outbreaks
- To monitor and evaluate overall preparedness, investigation and response to ensure documentation of all outbreaks and provide feedback at all levels.



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Role and Responsibilities Of the EHPs in case investigation



- Reporting on the prescribed reporting format timeously
- Participating in the outbreak response teams activities and adhering to the terms of reference of the ORT
- **Liaising with the laboratory for sampling results**
- Participating in Community Awareness Programmes
- Ensure Law Enforcement is carried out
- Respond to media Queries and Parliamentary Questions through proper structures
- Provide information to assist with the investigation



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Role and Responsibilities



❖ Environmental Health

- Conduct environmental assessment(inspection of premises, hygiene, water and sanitation)and management of risk factors.
- Distribute and share the environmental health assessment information with other outbreak response team members, e.g. Communicable Disease Control Coordinator, Health Promotion Manager and Surveillance Officer
- Collect environmental samples for laboratory testing in order to confirm sources of outbreaks
- Facilitate Port Health activities

❖ Food Control

- Play a central role in the implementation of Food Control Regulations to prevent foodborne diseases and provide technical and legal support in case of foodborne or related outbreaks
- Coordinate food recall activities during foodborne outbreaks in conjunction with the National consumer commission.



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CASE INVESTIGATION: *Educate yourself*



Disease outbreaks may be notified through various sources, e.g. clinical and laboratory surveillance, community members and leaders, and media.

- Proper Planning: Decide whether to investigate or not
- Verify reported information
- Treated with Urgency
- Resource Planning
- Review information known about the illness and its transmission mode
- Identify geographical location, target Group and items for investigation
- Prepare for Laboratory logistics
- Methods of Investigation: Collection and record information, agree on how to analyse collected information, e.g. line list
- Confirm Diagnosis, laboratory standard(Sampling Procedure)
- **Joint evaluation of laboratory results (Lacking to be improved)**
- Review Clinical History: Onset of illness, contacts, possible sources



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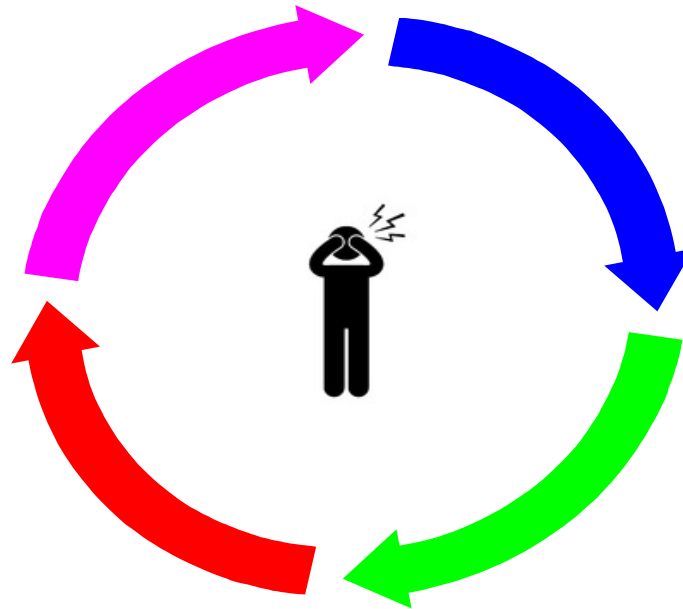
CASE INVESTIGATION



Diagnosis / Detection

Evaluation

Reporting /
Data Collection



Analysis,
Interpretation

Action!

Communicating/Disseminating Information



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CASE INVESTIGATION



Questions to be asked during investigation to Patient or Contacts

- Where do you live?
- When did the symptoms begin?
- Who else is sick in your home (or workplace, village, neighbourhood), Refer contacts to the nearest Health Facility
- Where have you travel recently?
- Where did you live within the 2 weeks prior to the onset of symptoms (residence at time of infection)?
- Were you visited by anyone within the last 2 weeks?
- What is the source of your water?
- What did you eat prior to the onset of the signs and symptoms?



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CASE INVESTIGATION



Site Visit

- Make sure that we bring along all required or identified investigation material
- The key function is to **IDENTIFY THE SOURCE OF INFECTION**(if we fail here, the source will never be known and will repeat in future)
- Officials should be vigilant, listen to the main person and those around, look around, search around, smell, and ask questions
- Look for leftovers, packaging, consider taking samples from the preparation area or the source where food was purchased. Follow sampling Procedure and package samples correctly
- Look at storage, Refuse disposal site, Containers, Cutlery used,
- Take samples: Food, Water, Swabs, Packaging, etc
- Samples should be promptly sent to the laboratory

How Does Case Investigation Assist?



- Informs and Educate the Public
- Improve access to Safe Water
- Prevents future Outbreaks and Stops the current Outbreak
- Confirms the Hypothesis
- Informs Health Awareness activities
- Informs Enforcement Activities
- Directs focus to Risky locations and Products
- Brings Closure

Challenges during FBI outbreak



- Shortage of printed food safety IEC material
- Shortage of transport at district level leading to delayed activities
- No office space /storage facilities to store seized unlabelled food.
- Line list of all affected cases not compiled by the facilities.
- Unable to geo-map the suspected cases/spaza shops reported.
- The National Health Laboratory Services (NHLS) is only limited to testing certain pesticides.
- Specimen not collected for all suspected cases.
- Long environmental testing laboratory turnaround time
- Food taken by the South African Police Service (SAPS) department is not accessible since sealed as crime scene evidence.
- Food leftovers consumed by affected learners/community members are not always available to collect for testing.
- Postmortem results are not shared.



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Roles and Responsibilities of Environmental Health during Food Product recalls



- Environmental Health unit will receive a notification from food control unit on a specific food product recall alert.
- To share an alert circular promptly with the Provinces, Municipalities, BMA and other relevant stakeholders.
- Communicate the specifics of the food product in question (Name, Size, batch number, dates and etc)
- Outline the health impacts from consuming such food product.
- sampling results to be shared for record keeping

Voluntary recalls:

- EHPs are to monitor retailers to ascertain the success of the recall by:
- Monitor and Record products listed
- Ensure all listed products are removed off the shelves.
- Require sampling results to be shared for record keeping

Roles and Responsibilities of Environmental Health during Food Product recalls..con..



Non-Voluntary recalls

- EHPs to conduct the actual removal of the product.
- Check the suppliers of those products
- Monitor and Record all suspected products listed
- Collect samples for testing
- Communicate with Consumers to return the product to place of purchase
- Ensure proper disposal(R328)
- Report and use the prescribed template.

NB: Monitor and reconcile your numbers: suppliers' quantity, how much was consumed, destroyed/disposed off.



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Recommendations



- There must be a coordinated system to enhance the role and responsibilities between EH and other stakeholders esp: SAPS.
- The implementation of legislation should not be negotiated nor compromised at any given time.
- EHPs to strengthen their visibility, involvement and participation in the ORT.
- EHPs should participate in the Provincial JOC
- EHPs to familiarize themselves with National structures such as Incidence Management team(IMT),
- Multi-sectoral National Outbreak Response Team (MNORT) / Public Health Event Coordinating Committee (PHECC) to be activated at all levels (national, provincial and district) to enhance cooperation.
- Municipalities must respond and report when the recall alerts are communicated



End.

Thank you



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