

No evidence of 'fake food', but tap water is sold as spring water, Motsoaledi says

Eight months after it began, South Africa's listeriosis outbreak - the largest the world had ever seen - is officially over. But the nation's alleged spate of "fake food"? Well, that may have been more hype than fact, Health Minister Aaron Motsoaledi revealed at a Pretoria press conference on Monday.



David Harrison

The foodborne bacteria, which can thrive in cold meats and unpasteurised dairy products, had claimed at least 218 lives as of July, according to the National Institute for Communicable Diseases statistics (NICD). The NICD eventually discovered the bug at 158 factories, all but nine of which were visited by health inspectors. Ultimately, more than 12,000 tons of food were recalled and destroyed, Motsoaledi said.

No cases of the illness have been reported in the last three months. But in its latest monthly disease update the NICD warns that the country will likely continue to face sporadic cases. The health department has stepped up measures to monitor the illness, re-training almost 900 health inspectors on how to prevent it and requiring all doctors to notify the department of new cases.

Fake food

Motsoaledi also addressed claims circulating in the media and via Facebook and Twitter of "fake food" in the country, including fake rice, fish, beef and bread.

Allegations prompted municipal investigations, which some foreign spaza shop owners in Soweto told *The Times* last week were partly to blame for violent looting.

The health department has found no evidence of fake food, Motsoaledi says. But the department did find proof of counterfeit goods, including tap water sold as branded spring water and imitation Robertsons spices.

Motsoaledi asked members of the public to report instances of possible fake food to the department — and to keep samples for testing. The public can call the health department on 011 386 2003 and the National Consumer Commission on 012 428 7000.

“We are asking for diligence because ever since the saga started, no one has given us any physical [evidence of] foodstuffs — we’ve just seen pictures on social media.”

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