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Health will help listeriosis victims and their families to litigate

CAPE TOWN — Health Minister Aaron Motsoaledi says his department will offer to help victims of the listeriosis outbreak and their families with potential litigation if they decide to take the matter further.

Motsoaledi delivered a statement to the National Assembly on the deadly disease yesterday.

During debate on his statement, Motsoaledi accused the DA of trying to launch an election campaign on the backs of those who had died from the disease.

This after DA MP Lindy Wilson received applause from sections of the public gallery after labelling the national health system a "death sentence for the poor", and called on South Africans to change their votes.

"You are even evoking the tragedy of Life Esidimeni. Listeria happened by a private sector company, and that's why you want to blame government again," Motsoaledi hit back.

"There's no way we are going to keep quiet [about the companies]. Laws are available to take into account. They are going to be punished according to available legislation.

"Those members of the community who want to litigate, we will give them all the information, data and all the expertise to help them litigate ... we will see what the DA will say."

He accused the DA of bringing supporters into the gallery. They were, however, wearing NFP T-shirts.

Motsoaledi was not the only MP who blamed the DA for wanting to protect the interests of the two companies implicated — Enterprise Foods and Rainbow Chicken.

NFP MP Sheik Imam said "those to his left" were trying to protect "white monopoly capital" and the companies involved. "The arrogant attitude of Enterprise Foods must not be tolerated. They must be brought to account, because the poorest of the poor are affected," Sheik Imam said.

EFF MP Elsabe Ntlangwini agreed, saying Enterprise Foods and Rainbow Chicken must account to Parliament.

"Why did they not follow the rules? Why did they not follow international regulations? It's not okay. These people need to be prosecuted," she said.

Earlier, Wilson said: "Listeriosis is treatable, a quick course of antibiotics, and in most instances, patients are good to go.

"The question then arises, why are we sitting with a record-breaking outbreak of a disease that has claimed the lives of so many South Africans?"

While she said she was not there to absolve either factory for the role they had played in the loss of lives in South Africa, she "questioned whether they are solely responsible".

ANC MP and chairperson of the health portfolio committee Mary-Ann Dunjwa said Motsoaledi's department should be commended.

Dunjwa said they agreed with the EFF and IFP that the DA was trying to protect the companies.

She also had an issue with the free food Parliament serves them during committee meetings, which can include nuts, yoghurt and fruit, depending on the choice of a given committee.

"Parliament must stop giving us bread with processed foods. As members of the National Assembly, we must not eat it, we must send it back, because we must lead by example," cried Dunjwa.

During his statement, Motsoaledi said the outbreak did not occur in January 2017 as was reported, but that was the date from which they were analysing data. The outbreak was considered to have occurred in June last year, and was identified in July. By March 2 this year, 948 cases had been lodged, a total of 569 patients traced, and 180 had died — a 27% case fatality rate.

Motsoaledi also had one last caution. "Listeria can contaminate any food. The reason the problem is cold meats, is because listeria is very sensitive to heat. Any other meat that is cooked, it dies; but in cold meat, it doesn't die." — News24.

EFF TO FILE PAPERS FOR CLASS ACTION

EFF leader Julius Malema yesterday said the party will serve papers next week to launch a class action lawsuit against companies implicated in the listeriosis outbreak.

Malema held a media conference in Johannesburg yesterday, where he called on EFF members in especially rural areas to remove any products linked to listeriosis that may still be on shelves in shops. But he criticised EFF members for removing frozen meats not associated with either Enterprise or Rainbow Chickens from fridges in the Shoprite store in Kokstad. He said shops that suffered a similar problem must give the EFF information and the EFF would act.

He said Rainbow Chicken Limited and Enterprise must take full responsibility for the outbreak and compensate those affected and the families of those who died.

Tiger Brands CEO Laurence MacDougall said earlier this week they were not satisfied a connection existed between the deaths of 180 people since 2017 and the Enterprise Food processing plant in Polokwane.

Malema said the Department of Health and the National Consumer Commission were as slow to contain the spread of the bacteria as President Cyril Ramaphosa was to remove MPs linked to state capture from his Cabinet. — Netwerk24.

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