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MEDIA STATEMENT

MEC METH CALLS FOR FOOD SAFETY INSPECTIONS TO BE INTENSIFIED

BHISHO — Eastern Cape MEC for Health, Nomakhosazana Meth has called for food safety inspections to be intensified and for action to be taken against shop owners found to be selling expired goods.

The number of learners presenting with abdominal pain, nausea and vomiting, itchiness, high temperature and shortness of breath, has now increased to 143.

This comes after a further 23 learners from a third school in Mlungisi township in Komani we're rushed to Frontier Hospital this morning.

Yesterday, 120 learners were treated in hospital and local clinic respectively.

There has been a spike in suspected food poisoning cases around the country in recent weeks with at least two children reported to have demised after eating snacks they had bought at a local shop in Gauteng.

Although there have been no reported fatalities in the Eastern Cape as a result of suspected food poisoning, one learner is recovering in ICU.

MEC Meth called for shop owners selling expired goods to be held accountable.

"The learner is in a stable condition in ICU. An urgent chest X-ray will be done today. We wish her a speedy recovery.

“We are calling on municipalities working with relevant stakeholders like law enforcement agencies to intensify the food safety inspection operations because we cannot afford to have shop owners selling expired goods to our children, which at times includes expired baby formula.

“The law must take its course against shop owners selling expired food items,” she said.

The Foodstuffs, Cosmetics and Disinfectants Act 54 of 1972 and the National Health Act of 2003 empowers municipalities to conduct food safety inspections blitz, fine transgressors, close shops that don't comply with the law and make arrests.

The MEC said the department is concerned with the prevalence of suspected food poisoning cases.

Although tests are yet to confirm the cause of illness of the 143 learners, they all reported buying snacks and food from local hawkers or local shops.

MEC Meth said: “We welcome the food inspection blitz and raids by Buffalo City Metro and Enoch Mgijima Local Municipality. We are calling for all our municipalities to embark on similar raids on a regular basis and not only when there are cases of suspected food poisoning.”

Issued by the Eastern Cape Department of Health

For inquiries, contact MEC's spokesperson Mkhululi Ndamase on 071 851 8338 or departmental spokesperson, Sizwe Kupelo on 083 3780196

