

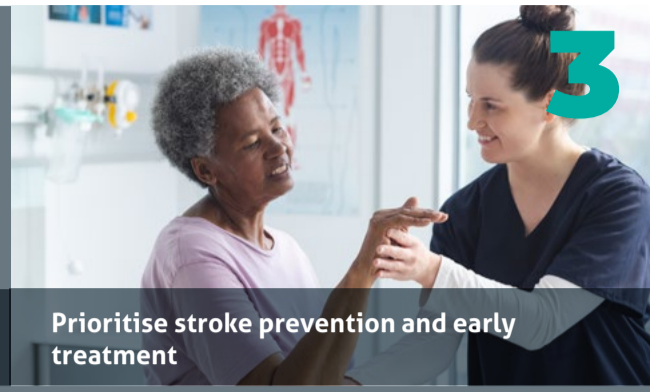
NEWS BULLETIN

Official Newsletter of the Gauteng Department of Health

03 NOVEMBER 2024



1600 spectacles issued



Prioritise stroke prevention and early treatment



Consumer Alert - rights and responsibilities



The issue of foodborne illnesses is a societal one and requires collaboration among all stakeholders. We must all work together to ensure a safer food environment for our families and communities. I call on communities to be vigilant and report non-compliance to local municipalities."
~ MEC Nkomo-Ralehoko

Food safety blitz results in a fine and shop closure in Ekurhuleni

A food safety compliance blitz in Alra Park in Nigel, Ekurhuleni uncovered serious violations at local spaza shops resulting in the issuing of a fine and another establishment being immediately shut down.

The Gauteng MEC for Health and Wellness, Nomantu Nkomo-Ralehoko and the City of Ekurhuleni's MMC for Developmental Planning and Real Estate, Nomadlozi Nkosi, together with a multidisciplinary team of environmental health experts, officials from various departments and law enforcement officers on Friday (01 November) embarked on a drive to monitor compliance with food safety standards by local businesses and to educate the public about food safety to protect public health.

This comes as Gauteng has reported over 372 cases of food-related illnesses and 16 fatalities since January 2024, with Ekurhuleni bearing the brunt of these incidents with over 190 incidents.

During the inspections, the team identified severe compliance issues across multiple establishments which prompted immediate actions. A compliance notice was issued at one spaza shop which requires the owners to rectify any violation within five days such as mixing of food and cleaning detergents on the same

shelves, storage of food products on the floor and poor hygiene practices.

Another establishment was found to operate illegally on municipal land with shop owners sleeping in the shop compromising hygiene standards. The shop was closed by authorities. In addition, law enforcement authorities confiscated unlabelled and expired food products from the shop.

Another shop received a verbal warning after addressing some compliance issues including the removal of dented cans and the need for proper labelling on food products.

The MEC emphasised the importance of community involvement in ensuring food safety. "The issue of foodborne illnesses is a societal one and requires collaboration among all stakeholders. We must all work together to ensure a safer food environment for our families and communities. I call on communities to be vigilant and report non-compliance to local municipalities," said MEC Nkomo-Ralehoko

The Gauteng Provincial Outbreak Response Teams have intensified educational efforts to promote safe food-handling practices and address compliance issues among shop



MEC for Health and Wellness Nomantu Nkomo-Ralehoko together with acting head of Hospital Services Dr. Stephen Mankupane participated in the Clinix Solomon Stix Morewa Hospital's Mental Health Roundtable to discuss the importance of mental health while highlighting the progress made in the lives of the patients. The MEC highlighted that the Department is turning its focus and efforts into supporting mental health patients on their journey to recovery by equipping them with the necessary skills and knowledge, to empower them to reclaim their lives and reintegrate into society with dignity and confidence.
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owners. It is important for spaza shop owners to comply with the law in order to protect consumers from possible food contamination.

Recent incidents of foodborne illnesses have shed light on the distinction between food poisoning and chemical poisoning. Food poisoning typically results from consuming contaminated food or water, while chemical poisoning, as seen in the recent deaths of children in Soweto, can stem from exposure to hazardous substances like organophosphate chemicals.

Over 1600 spectacles issued to improve learning

The increasing rise in myopia among school children is a growing concern across the globe. Myopia also known as shortsightedness is a common vision problem especially among children aged between 6 and 14 years. Symptoms of myopia includes blurry vision, squinting, frequent eye rubbing and frequent headaches.

In an effort to raise awareness about the importance of eye health, the Gauteng MEC for Health and Wellness, Nomantu Nkomo-Ralehoko has called on parents and caregivers to protect children's eyes and prioritise vision care.

Speaking at an awareness event to mark World Sight Day held at Phillip Kushlick Special School under the theme: "Love the Eyes of a Child," MEC Nkomo-Ralehoko emphasised the importance of regular eye check-ups, encouraging outdoor activities and limiting screen time to promote good vision for our children.

"It is concerning that children are developing shortsightedness at such a young age affecting their learning potential. We must educate the little ones about the dangers of spending too much time on digital screens and encourage them to engage in outdoor activities", said MEC Nkomo-Ralehoko.

Through partnerships with sponsors and stakeholders including the Clinton Health Access Initiative (CHAI), The Ruya, Special Olympics, Al-Imdaad Foundation, Surgical Ophthalmic Supplies, Ukubona Foundation and Tripple 8, a total of 62 spectacles were issued to the learners.



This is part of ongoing efforts to ensure that all school going children with vision challenges are provided with spectacles. Since the beginning of the 2024/25 financial year, a total of 1651 spectacles have been issued to learners from various schools across the province.

"As the school, we are grateful to all the sponsors who made it possible for our learners with eyesight challenges to receive the spectacles. This will go a long way in enabling them to engage in learning activities without any vision difficulties", said Mariam Makhetha, the Principal of Philip Kushlick Special School located inside Chris Hani Baragwanath Hospital in Soweto.

The school caters for learners with developmental delays and neurological conditions such as cerebral palsy and other medical conditions that affects their mobility and intellectual capability. Currently, 348 learners from Soweto and surrounding areas are enrolled at the school.

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Parents with children showing symptoms of myopia are advised to take them to the nearest healthcare facility for a diagnosis. Even though myopia cannot be cured, treatment can improve your child's vision and prevent it from getting worse.

Public-Private Partnership expands access to mammography services

Koketso Maraba

To address the gaps in mammogram services, the Gauteng Department of Health has finalised a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with PinkDrive which aims to ensure that cancer diagnosis and timely referrals for treatment become accessible throughout the province.

Currently, only 10 public hospitals in Gauteng offer mammogram services. This Public-Private Partnerships will minimise waiting times, ensuring timely care for patients, particularly those with prostate and breast cancer.

This partnership will see the newly unveiled Mammography truck which is equipped with modern technology to conduct mammograms, breast exams and screenings for cervical, prostate and testicular cancers providing the services across the province, including at the Corner-to-Corner activations to reach the under-served areas.

Noleen Kotschan, the Chief Executive Officer and Founder of PinkDrive explained that the PinkDrive vehicle would be used for more than just cancer screening; it would also be used for other programmes such as the HPV vaccination drive. In addition, the new Mammography truck will complement the sixteen Volkswagen Crafter mobile health clinics donated by the DG Murray



Trust. These clinics will offer essential services such as TB screening, HIV testing, diabetes and hypertension monitoring, child immunisations and reproductive health services across the five health districts.

Speaking at the unveiling of the mobile unit, the Gauteng MEC for Health and Wellness, Nomantu Nkomo-Ralehoko commended PinkDrive for their efforts in empowering communities to take control of their health.

"Community empowerment is a crucial step in our fight against cancer. We must intensify efforts to share information and knowledge about the importance of screening, self-examinations, and mammograms to help our communities detect cancer early in order to reduce treatment complexity and lessen the financial and emotional strain on patients and their families," said MEC Nkomo-Ralehoko.

The MEC further emphasised the Department's commitment to improving oncology services to cater for the growing needs of cancer treatment. The Department has finalised a three-year contract for Gamma Cameras which came into effect from 1st of November 2024. Gamma cameras or scintillation cameras are essential imaging devices in nuclear medicine that detect radiation and analyse radioactive events in the body for diagnostic purposes.

Furthermore, the Department has completed the process to outsource radiotherapy services to private healthcare providers with an allocation of R260 million for a period of 24 months. This move focuses on addressing the most urgent cases, with prostate cancer patients facing an average waiting time of 300 days and breast cancer patients around 120 days. The Service Level Agreement (SLA) is being finalised, and treatments are expected to commence soon.

Prioritise stroke prevention and early treatment, public urged

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), stroke is one of the leading non-communicable diseases (NCDs) contributing to high mortality rates globally.

In Gauteng, the trends are particularly significant due to the province's high population density and urban lifestyle, both of which contribute to the risk factors associated with stroke.

The province has seen a noticeable increase in stroke cases in recent years, with thousands of new cases reported annually across the province's hospitals. In the 2023/24 financial year alone, approximately 7 991 new stroke patients were treated in physiotherapy departments within public hospitals.

This growing prevalence can be attributed to several factors, including an aging population and a high incidence of lifestyle-related health risks such as hypertension, diabetes, obesity, and high cholesterol. Additionally, the high levels of stress and limited physical activity associated with urban life are contributing factors specific to Gauteng.

During National Stroke Week (28 October to 3 November), the department has emphasised on the importance of awareness, prevention, and early treatment of stroke to curb this trend.

"Recent figures from the department show a worrying number of stroke cases across several of the province's major healthcare facilities. Tembisa Provincial Tertiary Hospital reported the highest number of new stroke patients with 1,250 cases treated in the physiotherapy department during 2023/24 Financial year, followed closely by Chris Hani Baragwanath Academic Hospital with 1,069 new stroke patients, and Helen Joseph Hospital with 755 new cases.



"Collectively, tertiary, and central hospitals have the bulk of new stroke cases, with over 4,200 patients seen across these facilities. These numbers underline the critical need for public awareness and quick medical intervention," explained Gauteng MEC for Health and Wellness, Nomantu Nkomo-Ralehoko.

The most important steps in combating stroke is recognising the early signs and symptoms. GDoH encourages residents to remember the FAST acronym: Face drooping on one side, Arm weakness, Speech difficulties, and Time to seek emergency medical help. Other symptoms include sudden trouble seeing in one or both eyes, dizziness, lack of coordination, and a severe headache. Immediate medical intervention is critical to minimise the impact of a stroke, and the hospitals are equipped to provide rapid treatment.

"Stroke is often linked to lifestyle diseases such as hypertension, diabetes, and high cholesterol. Factors such as poor diet, high salt intake, limited physical activity, smoking, and excessive alcohol consumption contribute to these conditions, raising the risk of stroke and other serious health issues," stated MEC Nkomo-Ralehoko further pointing out that the department advocates for preventive measures to lower the risk of stroke, including maintaining a healthy diet and regular exercise while limiting salt and processed foods. Avoiding smoking and limiting alcohol intake

further reduces risk, and routine health screenings for blood pressure, cholesterol, and blood sugar levels help detect warning signs early.

For stroke patients recovery is possible, and with timely treatment, many regain independence and quality of life. Survivors are encouraged to engage in physiotherapy, often available at their local hospitals, to regain mobility and strength.

GDoH remains committed to reducing the stroke burden through public education and awareness, and by strengthening emergency response and treatment capabilities in health facilities.

Meanwhile, in 2022 Steve Biko Academic Hospital (SBAH) became the first and only internationally accredited stroke unit in South Africa. The hospital was awarded the Diamond Stroke Award by the International European Stroke Congress for how it has improved the management of stroke patients.

The stroke unit at SBAH boasts state-of-the-art equipment and advanced technological devices such as cameras linked to the cellphones of clinicians to alert them on the status of patients and Nintendo Wii games which are used as part of physiotherapy for stroke patients. It also has a rapid software that allows the unit to assess and give treatment to patients up to nine hours after the onset of a stroke.

Stroke survivor's journey highlights importance of early care and rehabilitation

Bonolo Pitse

Stories of resilience are unfolding daily at Dr George Mukhari Academic Hospital (DGMHAH) as increasing numbers of stroke survivors make their way through the hospital's physiotherapy unit. Among them is 66-year-old Lucas Mulaudzi, who has fought through three strokes and continues to pursue his journey of recovery.

Mulaudzi's experience highlights not only the personal toll of stroke but also the urgent need for awareness about preventing and managing conditions like hypertension that can lead to this life-altering condition.

Mulaudzi's struggle began after he missed taking his hypertension medication, a common but serious misstep that led to his first stroke. Initially seeking alternative treatment from a traditional healer, Mulaudzi experienced a second stroke only two weeks later. "After the third stroke, I ended up back in the hospital," he recalls.

"The strokes affected my whole body, and I am not fully functional, but I am grateful to the staff for helping me because I would have died." Today, Mulaudzi attends monthly treatments at DGMHAH for stroke, heart, and hypertension management, determined to get better.

Mulaudzi's case is part of a growing trend observed by the hospital's physiotherapy team. "We are seeing over 50 stroke patients every month, both new cases and follow-ups," says physiotherapist Evah Molapisi. "Many patients are younger than ever before, and the number has only increased from the past three to four years.



*"The strokes affected my whole body, and I am not fully functional, but I am grateful to the staff for helping me because I would have died."
~ Mulaudzi.*

Our team is stretched, but we are committed to helping each patient regain their independence."

Molapisi's work in the physiotherapy unit centers on helping patients regain as much movement and function as possible. Physiotherapy is a critical component in stroke recovery, as it targets the physical limitations resulting from brain injury, allowing patients to relearn motor skills, improve strength, and increase

their mobility. "Our goal is to help the brain relearn how to use affected areas, even if recovery isn't complete. Each patient's progress depends on the severity of the stroke and their age, but with consistent therapy, we see remarkable improvements," he points out.

The increase in stroke cases at DGMHAH reflects broader trends across Gauteng, where an urban lifestyle, stress, diet, and lack of exercise are often associated with hypertension and other conditions that increase stroke risk. Early intervention, including physiotherapy, can significantly improve survival chances and quality of life after a stroke.

"When stroke patients arrive early, they have a better chance of regaining movement and preventing further complications," Molapisi explains. "The sooner we begin physiotherapy, the more likely it is that the patient will experience a meaningful recovery."

Speaking at a community radio station, acting Director of Non-Communicable Diseases at the Gauteng Department of Health Patrick Magodzho, stressed the importance of seeking hospital assistance immediately upon noticing symptoms of a stroke, such as sudden numbness, confusion, difficulty speaking, or severe headache. "The faster we can treat a stroke, the better the outcomes," he says, highlighting that immediate medical attention and therapy can reduce long-term impact and save lives.

Magodzho is concerned by the rising number of stroke cases, which he attributes largely to lifestyle diseases like hypertension. Hypertension, often called the "silent killer," is a leading cause of stroke, especially when left unmanaged. Defaulting on hypertension medication, as in Mulaudzi's case, can have devastating consequences. "Many people don't understand that skipping medication for high blood pressure is extremely dangerous. Hypertension must be managed daily; otherwise, it leads to serious risks like stroke," Magodzho emphasises.

For Mulaudzi, the journey has been challenging but filled with gratitude. "I'm still here, and I'm still fighting," he says, appreciative of the care he has received at DGMHAH. His story is a reminder of the strength that many stroke survivors demonstrate, as well as the importance of adhering to prescribed treatments and understanding the risk factors that contribute to stroke.



CONSUMER ALERTS:

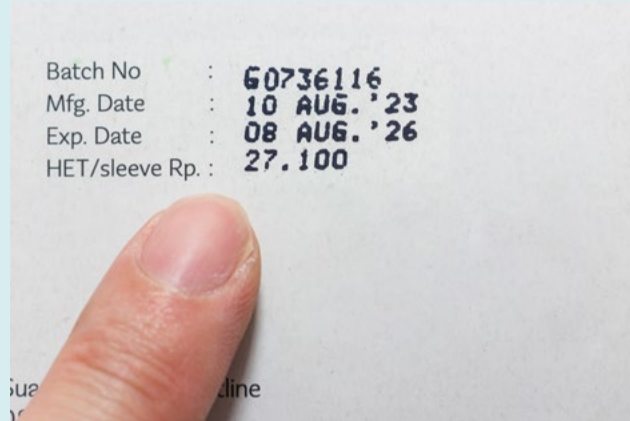
Be a wise consumer and protect yourself

Milly Viljoen

The rise in food-borne illnesses in communities has become a growing public health concern which is compounded by socio economic factors. This has exposed the urgent need to strengthen public education and awareness around this issue especially in relation to consumer rights and responsibilities.

This consumer alert feature, will in the next couple of months, on a bi-weekly basis, engage readers in a conversation, as it tackles an aspect of consumer rights and responsibilities.

Alert 1: Do not buy foodstuffs that have reached the expiry: use-by/sell-by dates. When buying groceries, take your time and check the dates before paying.



Alert 2: All foodstuffs must have "Expiry: Use/Sell-by" and or "Best Before" dates. Inform the Gauteng Office of Consumer Affairs if you notice any alterations (tempering) of these dates and in the labeling of goods.

Alert 3: Do not buy dented or rusted canned foods before or after the valid "Best Before" dates. Such products are dangerous and will cause severe food poisoning that will harm your health.

Alert 4: Follow the storage instructions on the labeling of foodstuffs to avoid food poisoning.

Alert 5: Refrain from buying products that are not labelled (no ingredients listed, no date markings and no manufacture details – physical address and telephone number). This is important to trace the manufacture in the event of reactions/falling ill after consumption.

Alert 6: Protect yourself and other consumers in your community by lodging complaints against suppliers that sell expired goods or foodstuffs without labeling. Contact the Environmental Health Practitioner (EHP) at the Municipal Offices closest to where the supplier is based, and notify the Gauteng Office of Consumer Affairs on 011 355 8006 or consumer@gauteng.gov.za



MATTERS TO US!

Down-to-earth sister commended for her care

I would like to compliment sister Mandisa from the Zone 17 Clinic in Sebokeng for always showing me care and motivating me when I was at the clinic feeling weak. I had a problem with my sugar levels and when I got to the clinic, she gave me counselling and advised me on the type of food I needed to eat. At my next visit, my blood sugar levels were at 4.5 and I was happy.

I came back again with a spine problem to the clinic and sister Mandisa made sure I saw a physiotherapist, while I was there, she also suggested I do my pap smear. Through her counselling, I also managed to reduce my stress. She gives advice, is down to earth, shows care, and has me feeling alive again.




Maria Lesoko,
from Sebokeng

* Letter grammatically edited

QUALITY ASSURANCE CONTACT US!



For any hospital or clinic complaints please contact the Gauteng Department of Health on the 24-hour customer line on.

-  **0800 203 886 (Toll free number)**
-  **patients.health@gauteng.gov.za or support@gauteng.gov.za**
-  **SMS : 35023**

For letters, contribution and suggestion contact GDoHstories@gauteng.gov.za

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