

4 ENTERIC DISEASES

a A review of foodborne illnesses reported to the NICD in 2015

Foodborne illnesses (FBIs) are a public health concern and are important causes of morbidity and mortality globally. FBIs are a notifiable medical event in South Africa. The National Institute for Communicable Diseases (NICD) Outbreak Response Unit (ORU) assists National Department of Health to collate FBI reports from district and provincial authorities. We conducted a retrospective descriptive review of FBI events reported to NICD-ORU between January and December 2015. The events had been investigated by districts and provincial communicable disease co-ordinators and environmental health practitioners with or without the assistance of NICD-ORU.

In total, 55 FBI events were reported affecting 2 070 patients and leading to 1 714 hospital visits, 104 hospital admissions and four deaths. Age and gender of affected persons were not consistently reported. Temporal and provincial distribution is shown in Figure 5 below. Most outbreaks were reported in warmer months (November 8/55, 15%; December 7/55, 13%; February 6/55, 11% and March 6/55, 11%) (Figure 5). The majority of outbreaks were reported from KwaZulu-Natal (23/55, 42%) and Gauteng (15/55, 27%) provinces (Figure 5). Most outbreaks occurred after

consumption of food prepared at institutions (i.e, schools, prisons or hospitals) (23/55, 42%) or at private homes (13/55, 24%). A significant number of FBI events (13/55, 24%) occurred following consumption of meat from an animal that had died or was slaughtered following an illness. Specimens had been collected in 35/55 (64%) outbreaks. Clinical or environmental results were available for 24/35 (69%). The pathogenic bacteria identified were *Salmonella* species (7/24, 29%), *Clostridium perfringens* (3/24, 13%), and *Shigella flexneri* (1/24, 4%).

Although FBIs are notifiable, it is highly likely they are underreported. The National Department of Health has rolled out provincial-wide training of environmental health practitioners and communicable disease co-ordinators to strengthen investigation and improve data collection following FBI events.

Source: Division of Public Health Surveillance and Response, NICD-NHLS; Centre for Enteric Diseases, NICD-NHLS; National Department of Health. (outbreak@nicd.ac.za)

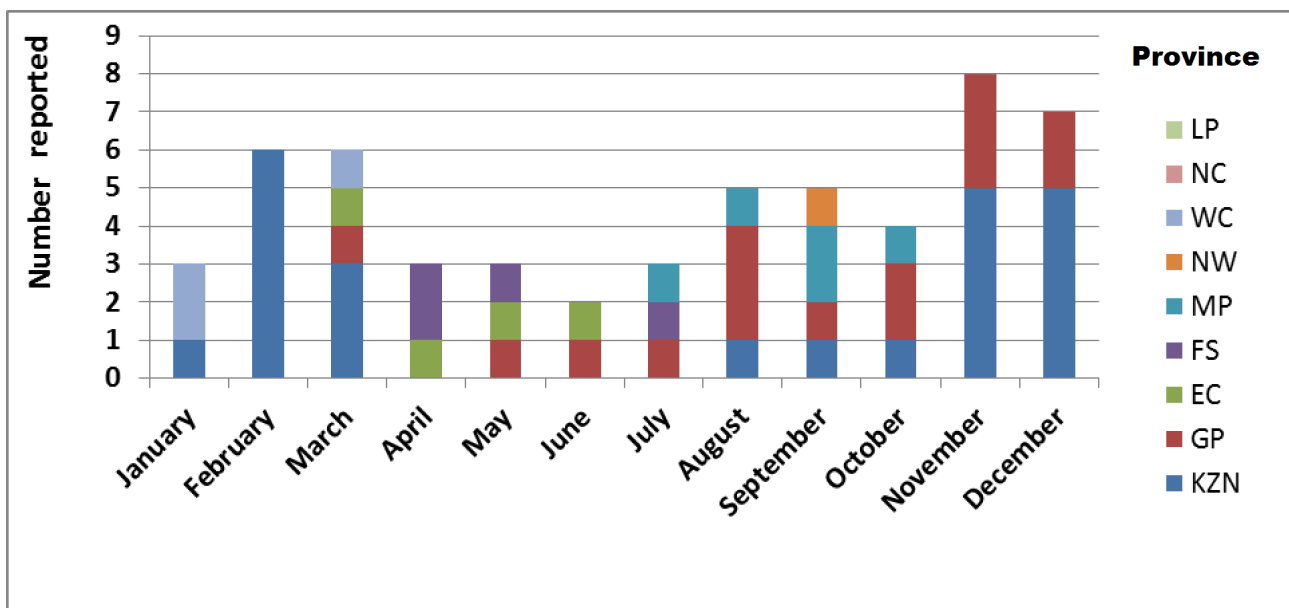


Figure 5. Number of foodborne illness events reported to the NICD-ORU by province per months, January - December 2015.