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Dr Godfrey Ssebbagala Lusiba,

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UNBS team investigates bacteria in infant milk

By Cecilia Okoth

The Uganda National Bureau of Standards (UNBS) yesterday dispatched a team of investigators to carry out market surveillance on infant milk produced by a French company that reportedly contains salmonella bacteria that causes fatal infections.

Godwin Muhwezi, the bureau's spokesperson, said they learnt that Lactalis Group, a French firm known to process a range of dairy products, notified its customers worldwide about a recall of its products believed to be contaminated with the bacteria.

The brands, he said, mostly affected include Picot powdered infant milk, Milumel and Celi.

Last Sunday, the BBC published a story of over 12 million boxes of powdered baby milk being recalled in 83 countries, regardless of the date of manufacture, in a salmonella scandal involving

"We are performing market surveillance inspections to ensure that affected products are removed from the market." UNBS spokesperson

French company Lactalis.

The countries affected were mainly in Europe, Asia, Latin America and Africa.

According to the publication, the dairy firm's CEO, Emmanuel Besnier, confirmed the extent of the contamination risk to French media, attributing the bacteria outbreak to renovations in one of its factories.

Following the outbreak, Muhwezi said all UNBS import inspectors at border points have been notified to withhold consignments with dairy products from Lactalis Group,

"until such a time when we are satisfied that the product recall has been completed."

"We are performing market surveillance inspections to ensure that affected products are removed from the market. We shall also carry out further laboratory tests to establish whether the products on the market are contaminated," he said.

In the meantime, the Bureau warned the public and consumers of the above products against buying them, until the product recall is complete.

UNBS, among its other roles, is responsible for enforcing standards in protection of public health and safety and the environment against dangerous and sub-standard products.

Dr Henry Mwebesa, the director general health of services at the Ministry of Health, said apart from expired food, the ministry had not experienced cases of adulterated infant powdered milk sold on the market.

"This could be the first of its kind and most corporate mothers who usually report to work after three months of maternity leave, could be at risk since they usually buy infant powdered milk for their babies," he said.

Mwebesa said the ministry would work closely with UNBS to withdraw the products from the market adding that the bacteria in question, which can be life-threatening, causes food poisoning, diarrhoea and vomiting.