

FEEDBACK REPORT FOLLOWING THE SUSPECTED FOOD POISONING INCIDENT AT
THE FUNERAL AT GA-MAJA, POLOKWANE MUNICIPALITY, CAPRICORN DISTRICT

20 May 2026

Programme Director,
MEC for Health, Ms Dieketseng Mashego,
Councillors,
Head of Department, Dr Ntodeni Ndwamato,
Head of Forensic Pathology, Dr Thakadu Mamashela,
Traditional Leaders,
Faith-Based Leaders,
Community Members,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thobela, Ndi Matsheloni, Avuxeni, Good Morning, Goeie Môre.

We gather here today under deeply painful and difficult circumstances. The tragedy that unfolded following the funeral gathering held on 18 April 2026 at Ga-Maja, Mmotong wa Bogobe Village has left this community carrying profound grief, unanswered questions and emotional scars that may take a long time to heal.

As government, we once again extend our heartfelt condolences to the families who lost their loved ones, to those who were hospitalised, and to every member of this community affected by this tragedy. We mourn with you. We stand with you. And we remain committed to ensuring that the truth surrounding this painful incident is fully established.

The passing of loved ones under such circumstances has shaken this community and the province at large. Among those we lost was a young child whose life was cut tragically short before their future could fully unfold. There can never be words sufficient enough to comfort families who continue to live with such pain.

When many people suddenly fell ill after consuming food served during the funeral gathering, fear and uncertainty quickly spread across the community. More than one hundred people sought medical attention, while several others were admitted to hospital for treatment and observation.

At a moment like this, communities deserve honesty, compassion and leadership. Families deserve answers. Government therefore had a responsibility to ensure that a thorough, professional and transparent investigation was conducted without fear, favour or speculation.

Today, we have returned to this community to provide feedback on the progress made thus far.

Immediately after the incident was reported, the South African Police Service opened inquest cases and established a dedicated investigation team under the supervision of senior leadership to ensure that every aspect of this matter receives the seriousness it deserves.

At the same time, the Department of Health activated its response teams. Post-mortem examinations were conducted, while biological specimens and food samples were submitted to the Forensic Chemistry Laboratory for scientific analysis.

The toxicology results received on 14 May 2026 indicate that no traces of poison, chemicals or drugs were detected in the samples that were analysed.

At this stage, the findings therefore do not support allegations that poison was present in the specimens examined.

However, as government, we believe it is important to communicate responsibly and truthfully with the community. The investigation process has not yet reached its final conclusion. Histology reports are still outstanding and additional investigative processes remain underway.

We cannot speculate. We cannot rush to conclusions. We must allow science, evidence and professional investigation processes to guide us. Our responsibility is to ensure that families receive accurate and credible information rather than assumptions or misinformation.

To the affected families, we fully understand that laboratory reports alone cannot remove your pain. No scientific explanation can replace a loved one. No report can erase the trauma and emotional burden that this community continues to carry.

We therefore want to assure you that government will continue to walk this journey with you until all processes are concluded.

Programme Director,

This tragic incident also serves as an important reminder about the need to strengthen health awareness and promote responsible practices within our communities.

Government wishes to encourage proper hygiene, safe food preparation and responsible food handling, particularly during large community gatherings such as funerals, weddings, church events and traditional ceremonies where food is prepared for many people.

Food preparation areas must always be kept clean. Water used for cooking must be safe. Utensils must be properly washed and food must be stored and prepared under hygienic conditions to reduce the risk of contamination and the spread of illness.

Equally important, we want to encourage community members to take precautionary health measures seriously. Individuals experiencing symptoms such as vomiting, diarrhoea, flu symptoms or infectious illnesses should avoid attending crowded gatherings where they may unknowingly place themselves and others at risk.

As much as funerals are important cultural and spiritual moments where communities gather to comfort grieving families, protecting the health and wellbeing of the community must remain a collective responsibility.

Programme Director,

We also wish to urge members of the community to avoid spreading unverified information, rumours or speculation on social media and other platforms. False information creates panic, deepens fear and undermines the integrity of ongoing investigations.

Let us allow health professionals, scientists and investigators the space to complete their work thoroughly and professionally.

As government, we remain committed to transparency, accountability and continued engagement with this community. Our responsibility does not end today. Leadership means standing with communities not only during moments of celebration, but also during moments of pain, uncertainty and grief.

We will continue to communicate openly as further reports become available.

May the souls of those we have lost rest in eternal peace. May God comfort the bereaved families, heal those who are recovering and give strength to this entire community during this difficult time.

I thank you.