

**Advisory Council on Food and Environmental Hygiene**

**Summary of Recent Food Incidents**

**1. High level of paralytic shellfish poisoning toxin in shellfish**

- The Centre for Food Safety (CFS) has been regularly monitoring the occurrence of Paralytic Shellfish Poisoning (PSP) toxin in shellfish under its routine food surveillance programme. On 27 April 2007, a scallop (sin pui) sample taken from a local market was found to contain PSP toxin at high level of 1,922 micrograms per 100 grams. The action level is 80 micrograms per 100 gram. In view of the high level of PSP toxin detected, the CFS immediately conducted a press briefing and issued a press release to warn the public not to consume the concerned scallops for the time being. Subsequent sampling and testing revealed the presence of PSP toxins in the range of 1,120 to 2,560 micrograms per 100 grams in another seven scallop (sin pui) samples, all belonging to the same species, scallops (*Patinopecten yessoensis* 蝦夷扇貝). Another four samples of sin pui belonging to a different species and five samples of a different type of scallop (dai tsi) were all found to be satisfactory.
- CFS also immediately stepped up surveillance and initiated source-tracing of the affected shellfish. Advice to public on safe consumption and to traders on reliable sourcing of shellfish was given. The issue was discussed in a monthly publication of the CFS, Food Safety Focus. The CFS also met with the trade to discuss on the food safety of shellfish. On 15 May, the HWFB and CFS met with the Mainland food authority to discuss on the enhancement of the existing food regulatory mechanism including that for shellfish.
- CFS continued to monitor the occurrence of PSP toxin in shellfish in local market. Some 40 samples of shellfish were collected in May. Results available so far for 32 samples were satisfactory.

## **2. Targeted surveillance on nitrite and nitrate in meat and meat products**

- Nitrate and nitrite are commonly used in meat products as preservatives. As high levels of nitrate and nitrite may be harmful to health and their use in fresh meat is prohibited in Hong Kong, the Centre for Food Safety (CFS) conducted a targeted food surveillance project of nitrate and nitrite in meat and meat products in March and April 2007. The results were announced through a media briefing and a press release.
- Two hundred and eighty two samples of fresh meat (42) and meat products (240) were collected for testing of nitrate and nitrite. Majority (99%) of the samples (279) were found to be satisfactory. While nitrate and nitrite were not detected in all fresh meat samples and all meat product samples were satisfactory with respect to nitrite, three meat product samples (two samples of dried pork slice and one sample of pork floss) were found to contain nitrate at 2100, 710 and 870 ppm respectively, exceeding the legal limit. Based on the detected levels of nitrates in the three unsatisfactory samples, adverse health effect upon normal consumption is unlikely.
- The unsatisfactory samples were collected from two local retail stores. Follow-up actions including issuing of warning letter to the vendor/supplier, withdrawal from sale, and disposal of the affected products and source tracing had been taken out. The suppliers concerned were requested to recall the affected products. The trade was reminded to use preservatives appropriately, follow good manufacturing practice and comply with legal requirements.

## **3. Seasonal food surveillance on rice dumplings**

- Under the seasonal food surveillance programme, the Centre for Food Safety (CFS) recently collected 79 samples of rice dumpling for testing. The samples were tested for chemicals including colouring matters (e.g. Sudan dyes, tartrazine), preservatives (e.g. boric acid, salicylic acid and benzoic acid), heavy metals (e.g. arsenic, cadmium, mercury) and pesticide residues (e.g. methamidophos and DDT), and pathogenic bacteria (e.g. *Salmonella*, *Staphylococcus aureus* and *Bacillus cereus*). CFS conducted media briefing and issued press releases to inform the public of the test results, and provide advice on purchase and preparation of rice dumplings.

- Among the results available, 77 samples were found to be satisfactory. Two samples were found to contain trace amount (0.046 and 0.12 ppm respectively) of a non-permitted colouring matter, Sudan IV. CFS has asked the concerned restaurants and food suppliers to stop selling the rice dumplings in question, remove the concerned products from the market and dispose of the concerned ingredients. CFS will take appropriate prosecution action if evidence is sufficient.

**Health, Welfare and Food Bureau  
Food and Environmental Hygiene Department  
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June 2007**