

**Advisory Council on Food and Environmental Hygiene**

**Summary of Recent Food Incidents**

**1. Targeted food surveillance on microbiological quality of ice-cream**

- The Centre for Food Safety (CFS) conducted from May to July 2007 a targeted food surveillance project to assess the microbiological quality of ice-cream products. About 1,100 samples were collected from various sources including food factories, supermarkets and restaurants for the testing of bacteria level and pathogens.
- The pathogens tested included *Salmonella*, *Staphylococcus aureus*, *Listeria monocytogenes*, *Shigella* and *Vibrio cholerae*. All the samples were tested negative for pathogens. As for bacteria level, three soft ice-cream samples were found to have coliform organisms at levels ranging from 1,100 to 1,900 per gramme. One of these samples and another sample were also found to have total bacterial count at respective levels of 83,000 and 54,000 per gramme. Although all these levels exceeded legal limits (more than 100 coliform organisms per gramme or more than 50000 bacteria per gramme), usual consumption is unlikely to pose significant health effect. The levels detected in these four samples were believed to be an indication of sub-optimal hygienic conditions during processing at the food premises concerned.
- The CFS had taken follow-up actions, including issuing warning letters to the food premises concerned. Advice on personal hygiene and cleaning of machine was given to the retail stores. Surveillance results were announced to the public.

**2. Targeted surveillance on colouring matters in soup mix and spicy snacks**

- Colouring matters are commonly applied to soup mix and spicy snacks to intensify their colour. Some are permitted colouring matters but some are not.

- To assess the level of colouring matters in spicy snacks and soup mix, the CFS from April to June 2007 collected 100 samples of spicy snacks (including potato chips, prawn chips and corn chips) and 100 samples of soup mix from supermarkets and retail outlets for the testing of colouring matters, including Sudan dyes, Acid Red 52, Orange II, Yellow OB, Dimethyl Yellow. Among the samples tested, three samples (1.5%) collected from supermarkets were found to contain non-permitted colouring matters. Results for the other samples (98.5%) were all satisfactory.
- Of the three samples, a corn chip sample and a spicy sliced cuttlefish sample were found to contain trace amounts of Sudan dyes. A rice cracker sample was found to contain Acid Red 52. Both Sudan dyes and Acid Red 52 are not permitted colouring matters in food. Based on the low levels of Sudan dyes detected and the low toxicity of Acid Red 52, normal consumption of the products is unlikely to pose adverse health effects.
- The CFS has taken follow-up actions, including issuing warning letters to the food premises concerned, asking them to stop selling the batch of food items detected with the non-permitted colouring matters and requesting concerned suppliers to recall the affected products. A press release on the surveillance results was issued.

### **3. Seasonal food surveillance on mooncakes**

- Mooncake is a popular food for the Mid-Autumn Festival. To provide food safety information on mooncakes to consumers and the trade in a timely manner, the CFS from August to September 2007 collected 263 mooncake samples of various types, including traditional, snowy and ice-cream mooncakes, from retail outlets and food factories for chemical and microbiological tests. The chemical tests included preservatives, colouring matters, sweeteners, antioxidants, pesticides and heavy metals. The microbiological tests covered pathogens such as *Salmonella*, *Staphylococcus aureus* and *Listeria monocytogenes*.
- All the sample results were satisfactory as far as the chemical tests were concerned. For microbiological tests, three ice-cream mooncake samples collected from retail stores were found to have total bacterial count at levels from 79,000 to 120,000 per gramme. Another sample collected from a food factory was found to have coliform organisms at a level of 240 per gramme. Although all the levels detected exceeded the legal limits (more than 50000 bacteria per

gramme or more than 100 coliform organisms per gramme), no pathogen which could pose adverse health effects was detected in the ice-cream mooncake samples in question. The levels detected in the samples was believed to be an indication of sub-optimal hygienic or storage conditions at the food premises concerned during handling.

- The CSF has taken follow-up actions, including issuing warning letters to the concerned food premises and asking them to stop selling and destroy the products concerned. Surveillance results were announced to the public. The CFS would consider instigating prosecutions if there is sufficient evidence.

**Centre for Food Safety  
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