

**Advisory Council on Food and Environmental Hygiene**

**Summary of Recent Food Incidents and Surveillance**

**Veterinary drug residues in canned pork products**

In late November to early December 2007, in response to overseas reports of detection of veterinary drug residues in some canned pork products, the Centre for Food Safety (CFS) collected a total of 19 samples of canned pork products of the same brands from the local market for testing. Among them, one sample was found to contain malachite green at 0.0066 ppm and two found to have nitrofurans metabolite AMOZ (at 0.0016 ppm and 0.0022 ppm).

2. Under existing legislation, malachite green and two nitrofurans are not allowed in food. The levels of nitrofurans and malachite green detected were low, and normal consumption should not pose serious health risks to consumers.

3. The CFS contacted the distributors of the concerned products. They initiated a recall and suspended sale of all pork products of the same brand. The CFS informed the public of the test results through Food Alert, press release and press briefing. The manufacturers and the Mainland food authority are still investigating into the cause and setting up control measures to prevent future recurrence. Sale of the deshelled products is yet to resume.

**Targeted surveillance on potassium bromate in flour-made products**

4. Potassium bromate was used in treating flour in the past. Due to its cancer-causing potential, the Joint FAO/WHO Expert Committee on Food Additives (JECFA) concluded in year 1992 that it was not appropriate to use bromate as a flour-treatment agent. The trade was advised against such practice in Hong Kong. The latest surveillance on flour in 2007 did not find potassium bromate in any sample.

5. In view of recent concerns about potassium bromate in potato chips, the CFS conducted a targeted food surveillance project to assess the use of potassium bromate in flour-made products in December 2007.

6. A total of 55 samples of flour-made products were tested, including biscuits, bread, potato chips, prawn crackers and corn flakes. All samples were found to be satisfactory. The surveillance results were announced to the public.

## **Seasonal food surveillance on Lunar New Year Food**

7. Shortly before the recent Lunar New Year, the CFS conducted a seasonal food surveillance project on Lunar New Year food. A total of 666 samples were collected for microbiological and chemical tests in December 2007 and January 2008.

8. Most of the test results (97.7%) were satisfactory. All the samples tested passed microbiological tests. For chemical tests, there were 15 unsatisfactory samples including 5 sweetened winter-melon, 2 bamboo fungus, 2 dried daylily flower and 1 sweetened mandarin (sulphur dioxide at levels from 690 ppm to 16,000 ppm); 1 festive cake (benzoic acid at 1,800 ppm); 3 glutinous rice ball (aflatoxins at levels from 0.046 ppm to 0.059 ppm) and 1 dried shrimp (boric acid at 410 ppm).

9. The samples of bamboo fungus and dried daylily flowers had the highest level of sulphur dioxide which could be removed after thorough soaking, washing and cooking. The levels of chemicals detected in other unsatisfactory samples were low and should not cause immediate health effects upon normal consumption.

10. The CFS issued warning letters to the shops concerned and conducted source tracing. Sale of the unsatisfactory products was stopped. The surveillance results were announced to the public in two phases by press releases.

## **Targeted surveillance on malachite green in aquatic products**

11. The CFS conducted a targeted food surveillance project on malachite green in aquatic products in November and December 2007. About 260 samples, including a variety of fish, fish products (minced fish and fish ball), shrimp and shellfish, were collected for testing.

12. The overall satisfactory rate was 98.5%. Trace amounts of malachite green were detected in four samples including two frozen bream fillets, one minced mud carp and one clam meat. The levels of malachite green ranged from 0.0031 ppm to 0.0057 ppm. At the levels detected, normal consumption should not pose any adverse health effects.

13. The CFS took follow-up actions, including issuing warning letters to the shops concerned requesting them to stop selling the products, and tracing the source. The surveillance results were announced to the public.

## **Mercury in tuna**

14. In January 2008, there were both local and overseas media reports that tuna samples contained excessive amount of mercury.

15. The food surveillance programme of CFS covers testing of metal contaminants, including mercury, in food. Surveillance data in 2007 showed that among some 1500 food samples (including around 140 samples of fish/ fish products) taken for analysis of mercury, only two alfonso samples were found containing excessive levels (1.4 ppm) of mercury, as compared with the legal limit of 0.5ppm. The surveillance results were announced to the public.

16. The CFS had conducted two risk assessment studies on dietary exposure to mercury of secondary school students in 2002 and 2004. Results of the latest study showed that the dietary exposures to mercury were below the safety reference values (i.e. Provisional Tolerable Weekly Intakes (PTWI)) for both average and high consumers. It can be concluded that secondary school students would be unlikely to experience major toxicological effects of mercury. Another risk assessment study on mercury levels in different fish species has been undertaken by the CFS, and is now at the stage of result analysis. On various occasions in the past, the public was advised to maintain a balanced diet to avoid excessive exposure to contaminants from a small range of food items. In particular, children and pregnant women were advised to avoid consuming large predatory fish which may contain higher concentrations of mercury. The CFS publication, Food Safety Focus, also published a series of articles on metallic contaminants since September 2007, the latest being an article on “Mercury and Food Safety” published on 16 January 2008.

### **Food poisoning cases in Japan suspected to be associated with dumplings**

17. In late January 2008 there were reports of food poisoning where some Japanese developed symptoms of pesticide poisoning after consumption of meat dumplings imported from China.

18. The CFS immediately contacted the Mainland authority and checked with major local retailers. Sale of dumplings of the same brand, initially available at four retailers, was stopped and samples were collected. Test results for pesticides were negative. The CFS is monitoring the latest developments.

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