

Advisory Council on Food and Environmental Hygiene

Summary of Recent Food Incidents (other than Melamine) and Surveillance

Targeted food surveillance on microbiological quality of ice-cream

The Centre for Food Safety (CFS) announced in August 2008 the results of the targeted food surveillance project for assessing the microbiological quality of ice-cream products. About 1 000 samples were collected from various sources including food factories, ice-cream vans, convenience stores, supermarkets and restaurants for testing of bacteria level and pathogens.

2. All the samples were tested negative for pathogens including *Salmonella* and *Staphylococcus aureus*. As for bacteria level, two soft ice-cream samples were found to have coliform organisms at respective levels of 170 and 570 per gram, exceeding the legal limit of 100 coliform organisms per gram. The levels detected in these two samples were believed to be an indication of sub-optimal hygienic conditions during processing.

3. The CFS took 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.

Seasonal food surveillance on mooncakes

4. Mooncake was 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 collected about 250 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 and antioxidants. The microbiological tests covered total bacterial count, coliform organisms and pathogens such as *Salmonella*, *Staphylococcus aureus* and *Listeria monocytogenes*.

5. Results of all samples were satisfactory and were announced at the beginning of September 2008 to the public. The trade was reminded to observe good hygiene practices in preparing and handling food, and to ensure that their food products were fit for human consumption and met legal requirements.

Targeted food surveillance on sulphur dioxide in meat

6. The CFS announced in October 2008 the results of the targeted food surveillance project for assessing the use of sulphur dioxide in meat. Under the law, sulphur dioxide should not be added to fresh or frozen meat.

7. A total of 291 meat samples (176 pork and 115 beef) were collected for testing of sulphur dioxide. The overall satisfactory rate was 93%. 19 samples (including 15 beef and 4 pork) were found to contain sulphur dioxide at levels between 10 and 2 100 ppm. These levels of sulphur dioxide should not pose adverse health effects on consumers upon normal consumption. As sulphur dioxide was water soluble, most of it could also be removed through washing and cooking.

8. Regarding the unsatisfactory results, the CFS took follow-up actions, including collecting follow-up samples and issuing warning letters.

Routine food surveillance: paralytic shellfish poisoning toxin in prepackaged scallop

9. The CFS had been regularly monitoring the occurrence of Paralytic Shellfish Poisoning (PSP) toxin in shellfish under its routine food surveillance programme. In September 2008, a prepackaged scallop (日式元貝) sample taken from a supermarket in Tai Po was found to contain PSP toxin at the level of 246 micrograms per 100 gram. PSP toxin can cause symptoms such as numbness of the mouth and extremities and gastrointestinal discomfort.

10. Regarding the unsatisfactory sample, the CFS took follow-up actions, including tracing the source of the scallop, asking the concerned supermarket to stop selling the food in question and issuing a warning letter to the supermarket. The CFS had also issued a press release to inform the public of the finding.

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