

Advisory Council on Food and Environmental Hygiene

Summary of Recent Food Surveillance

Purpose

This paper summarizes the main results of a number of targeted food surveillance projects that have been carried out by the Centre for Food Safety (CFS) since January 2011.

Targeted surveillance on preservatives in preserved fruits and vegetables

2. A targeted project to assess the use of preservatives in preserved fruits and vegetables was announced in early 2011. A total of 450 samples were collected from various retail outlets for testing. The overall satisfactory rate was 98.7%, with six unsatisfactory samples.

3. Among the unsatisfactory samples, a pickled sweet ginger was found to have sulphur dioxide at 197ppm, while five preserved fruits were found to have sulphur dioxide with levels ranging from 1570 to 3940ppm and benzoic acid with levels ranging from 1530 to 1700ppm. As both preservatives are of low toxicity, adverse health effect was unlikely upon normal consumption. However, susceptible individuals who are allergic to sulphur dioxide, may experience breathing difficulty, headaches and nausea.

4. The CFS had taken follow-up actions including issuing warning letters, source tracing and taking further samples for testing. The results of the follow-up samples were satisfactory and the concerned vendors subsequently stopped the sales of the food items.

Seasonal food surveillance on Lunar New Year food

5. In early 2011, the CFS had completed a seasonal food surveillance project on Lunar New Year food. A total of 684 samples were collected from local food factories and different retail outlets (e.g. supermarkets, groceries, market stalls and restaurants) for microbiological and chemical tests. The overall satisfactory rate was 99.6%, with three unsatisfactory samples.

6. Among the unsatisfactory samples, one sweetened winter melon and two bamboo fungus were found to contain sulphur dioxide with levels ranging from 643 to 2200ppm. All of them did not pose adverse health effects to the public upon normal consumption.

7. The CFS had taken similar follow-up actions as mentioned in paragraph 4 above.

Popular food items survey on hotpot soup bases

8. In view of the public's concern about media reports on "One Drop of Incense" usage in food premises in the Mainland and the safety of soup ingredients in hotpot, the CFS collected different types of hotpot soup bases, including prepackaged soup packs, from several local food premises for chemical tests from December 2010 to February 2011. The tests covered heavy metals, colouring matters, preservatives, antioxidants and mineral oil (e.g. paraffin).

9. Among the 67 samples collected, one sample was found unsatisfactory. The overall satisfactory rate was 98.5%. The unsatisfactory sample was found to contain a non-permitted colouring matter in food, Orange II. Normal consumption of food containing Orange II, which is of low toxicity, should not pose adverse health effects.

10. The CFS had taken follow-up actions including source-tracing, requesting concerned vendor to stop sale and dispose of those unsatisfactory food items, taking further samples and issuing warning letter. The result of the follow-up sample was satisfactory.

11. During this study period, the CFS could not find "One Drop of Incense" available for sale locally.

**Food and Health Bureau
Food and Environmental Hygiene Department
Centre for Food Safety
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