

Fish ball sample detected with methylmercury at level that may have breached Food Adulteration (Metallic Contamination) Regulations

The Centre for Food Safety (CFS) of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department today (December 31) announced that a loose-packed fish ball sample was detected with methylmercury, a metallic contaminant, at a level which may have contravened the Food Adulteration (Metallic Contamination) Regulations. The CFS is following up on the incident.

A spokesman for the CFS said, "When following up on a related incident, the CFS collected the above-mentioned sample from a restaurant in North Point for testing. The test result showed that the sample contained methylmercury at a level of 0.4 parts per million (ppm). The CFS' risk assessment revealed that if prolonged consumption of the compounded food occurs, the concerned metal level may pose adverse effect on health."

The spokesman said that the CFS had informed the restaurant concerned and the supplier of the product of the irregularity and had requested them to stop the sale of the affected product. Prosecution will be instituted should there be sufficient evidence.

"Methylmercury is the major form of mercury in fish. At high levels, mercury can affect foetal brain development, and affect vision, hearing, muscle co-ordination and memory in adults. Furthermore, as some international organisations such as the World Health Organization have pointed out, consuming predatory fish species is the main source of mercury intake for human beings. The report of the CFS' Total Diet Study has also pointed out that large fish or predatory fish species may contain high mercury levels (for example, tuna, alfonso, shark, swordfish, marlin, orange roughy and king mackerel). Hence, groups particularly susceptible to the adverse effects of mercury, such as pregnant women, women planning pregnancy and young children, should opt for fish that are smaller in size for consumption and avoid consumption of the above-mentioned types of fish to minimise excessive exposure to metal contaminants in food," he added.

According to the Food Adulteration (Metallic Contamination) Regulations (Cap. 132V), any person who sells food with metallic contamination in an amount that is dangerous or prejudicial to health is liable upon conviction to a fine of \$50,000 and imprisonment for six months.

The CFS will continue to follow up on the incident and take appropriate action. Investigation is ongoing.

FHB welcomes approval of first batch of products for sale in Mainland under streamlined procedures for HK registered traditional pCms for external use to be registered in GBA

The Food and Health Bureau (FHB) today (December 31) welcomed the announcement made by the Guangdong Provincial Medical Products Administration (GDMPA) on the first batch of products approved for sale in the Mainland under the streamlined approval procedures for Hong Kong registered traditional proprietary Chinese medicines (pCms) for external use to be registered and sold in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (GBA).

Since the GDMPA's announcement in August this year on the arrangement of streamlining the approval procedures for Hong Kong registered traditional pCms for external use to be registered and sold in the GBA, the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) Government has been maintaining close liaison with the relevant Mainland authorities and actively promoting the relevant measure to the Hong Kong pCm trade. The first batch of approved products for sale in the Mainland concerns three items, comprising two products manufactured and registered in Hong Kong, and the remaining one manufactured in Macao and also registered in Hong Kong.

The Secretary for Food and Health, Professor Sophia Chan, said, "The HKSAR Government expresses gratitude to the Central Government and the GDMPA for their staunch support for the development of Chinese medicine in Hong Kong, facilitating the smooth implementation of the relevant measure. The HKSAR Government is pleased to know that, within a short time frame after the GDMPA officially began accepting registration applications in September 2021, there are Hong Kong pCm products that have benefitted from the relevant measure and are approved by the GDMPA for registration in the GBA, thus enabling sale in the Mainland. The GDMPA is processing more applications in phases, and more Hong Kong registered traditional pCms for external use are expected to be able to be registered and sold in the GBA through the relevant measure, thereby greatly reducing the processing time and simplifying the procedures. The relevant measure enables Hong Kong pCm manufacturers to expand their markets, as well as creates favourable conditions for Hong Kong pCms to 'go global' in the long run."

To advance the development of Chinese medicine in the GBA, the National Administration of Traditional Chinese Medicine issued in September 2020 the Construction Plan for the Chinese Medicine Highlands in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (2020-2025). Major Hong Kong-related measures

include taking the opportunity of the development of the first Chinese medicine hospital (CMH) in Hong Kong to establish a GBA Chinese medicine consortium and CMH community; encouraging Hong Kong Chinese medicine practitioners to practise in Mainland public healthcare institutions; giving full play to Hong Kong's strengths as a Chinese medicine testing centre, with a view to developing Hong Kong into an international hub for drug testing and quality control research for Chinese medicine; and streamlining the approval procedures for Hong Kong registered traditional pCms for external use to be registered in the GBA.

Meanwhile, the National Medical Products Administration promulgated in November 2020 the Work Plan for Regulatory Innovation and Development of Pharmaceutical and Medical Device in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area, entrusting the GMPA to commence the relevant work in relation to streamlining the registration procedures for importing Hong Kong registered traditional pCms for external use. The GMPA promulgated on August 27, 2021, a notice regarding the streamlining of approval procedures for Hong Kong registered traditional pCms for external use. The holder of any traditional pCm for external use that has been registered with the Chinese Medicine Council of Hong Kong and in use in Hong Kong for more than five years may apply for registration with the GMPA through the streamlined procedures, and the successfully approved pCms may be sold in the Mainland.

Post-vaccination serologic testing for babies born to mothers infected with hepatitis B virus

The Department of Health (DH) today (December 31) announced that babies attending its Maternal and Child Health Centres (MCHCs) who are born to mothers infected with hepatitis B virus (HBV) will be offered with serologic testing after hepatitis B vaccination starting from tomorrow (January 1, 2022), with a view to further reducing the mother-to-child transmission (MTCT) of hepatitis B and realising a hepatitis B-free generation in Hong Kong.

MTCT is the major route of transmission of HBV. In 2020, about 3.4 per cent of pregnant women who attended antenatal care at MCHCs were infected with HBV in Hong Kong. Ninety per cent of neonates would develop chronic hepatitis B infection if they became infected.

The Government has been attaching importance to its work on prevention and control of hepatitis. Universal antenatal screening and childhood hepatitis B vaccination have been in place in Hong Kong since the 1980s. The coverage for the hepatitis B vaccination programme generally has reached over

99 per cent. Babies born to HBV-infected mothers are given hepatitis B immunoglobulin at birth. These measures have resulted in a substantial decline in the incidence of HBV infection in the younger generation. To further reduce the risk of MTCT of hepatitis B, pregnant women with a high HBV viral load have also been provided with antiviral since August 2020.

Hepatitis B vaccination is effective in preventing HBV infection. About 90 to 95 per cent of babies can produce adequate protective antibodies after vaccination. Post-vaccination serologic testing (PVST) can assess the immune response to vaccination and hepatitis B infection status. Starting from tomorrow, the Government will provide PVST to babies born to mothers infected with HBV in or after April 2021.

If the test results show that babies have not developed adequate protective antibodies, they will be given a second three-dose series of hepatitis B vaccines in MCHCs, followed by another PVST to ascertain the immune response. Babies found to be infected with HBV will be referred for specialist management and follow-up.

To meet the World Health Organization's goal of eliminating the major public health threat posed by viral hepatitis by 2030, the Government launched the [Hong Kong Viral Hepatitis Action Plan 2020 – 2024](#) in October 2020, setting out a comprehensive strategy with specific actions by the DH, the Hospital Authority and other stakeholders, to reduce transmission of viral hepatitis, as well as the related morbidity and mortality. Prevention of MTCT of hepatitis B is one of the focuses of the Action Plan.

A spokesman for the DH reminded parents that all newborn babies should complete the three-dose course of hepatitis B vaccination, while mothers with HBV infection should receive appropriate antenatal care and long-term management of their liver condition.

More information about MTCT of hepatitis B is available at the DH's website (www.hepatitis.gov.hk/english/hepatitis_elimination/maternal_transmission_of_hepatitis_b.html).

Government tightens boarding and quarantine requirements for places with Omicron cases detected

The Government announced today (December 31) that in view of the latest global developments of the COVID-19 pandemic situation, Libya will be specified as a Group A specified place from 0.00am on January 3, 2022, to tighten the boarding and quarantine requirements for relevant inbound

travellers.

To manage and prevent the importation risks posed by Omicron cases, the Government will continue to employ the most stringent measures to guard against importation of cases. Overseas places where Omicron cases have been detected that may lead to local transmission and exportation of cases will be specified as Group A specified places. Noting that the detection of Omicron cases was confirmed in Libya, the Government will specify it as a Group A specified place from 0.00am on January 3, 2022. Non-Hong Kong residents who have stayed there within 21 days will not be allowed to enter Hong Kong. Hong Kong residents can only board a flight for Hong Kong if they have been fully vaccinated and hold a recognised vaccination record. They will have to undergo compulsory quarantine in a designated quarantine hotel for 21 days upon returning to Hong Kong, with six tests to be conducted during quarantine, followed by compulsory testing in a community testing centre on the 26th day of arrival in Hong Kong.

Details on the relevant boarding and compulsory quarantine requirements for respective specified places can be found at www.coronavirus.gov.hk/eng/inbound-travel.html.

The Government will gazette the relevant updated specifications under the Prevention and Control of Disease (Regulation of Cross-boundary Conveyances and Travellers) Regulation (Cap. 599H) to effect the above measures.

[Public hospitals gear up for challenging epidemic](#)

The following is issued on behalf of the Hospital Authority:

In light of the challenging COVID-19 epidemic lately, the Hospital Authority (HA) Central Command Committee today (December 31) examined the readiness of various anti-epidemic facilities, manpower and medical supplies, alongside the planning of the contingency response for public hospitals to cope with a possible rapid surge in confirmed cases.

The HA also reminded frontline healthcare staff of Accident and Emergency Departments and general out-patient clinics to be vigilant and pay particular attention to patients' travel history, occupation, contact with any confirmed patient or compulsory testing requirements. Appropriate infection control arrangements and personal protective equipment should be applied accordingly.

"Around 180 confirmed patients are currently hospitalised in the North Lantau Hospital Hong Kong Infection Control Centre (HKICC) and the HA

Infectious Disease Centre located at Princess Margaret Hospital. As single isolation is required both for confirmed patients with a mutant strain and preliminarily confirmed patients pending test results, there is growing pressure in patient admission at the HKICC. The HA decided to reopen the standby community treatment facility at AsiaWorld-Expo on Sunday (January 2, 2022) to provide 500 more beds, including 20 negative pressure cubicles," an HA spokesperson said.

"If the epidemic deteriorates further, the HA could deploy, in phases, the 1 200 isolation beds and 600 tier-2 isolation beds in public hospitals for the admission of elderly, paediatric and severe patients in particular."

The spokesperson added that the HA has a stock of personal protective equipment to last more than six months. "In preparation for the treatment of severe patients, there are around 1 500 ventilators in total in various public hospitals. Specific training courses on ventilator application have also been organised for healthcare staff not working in Intensive Care Units to enhance the flexibility in manpower deployment," the spokesperson said.

The HA laboratories can handle rapid tests of up to 15 000 patient specimens each day. Preliminary analysis of mutant strains can also be conducted to support clinical decisions on single or cohort isolation arrangements of confirmed patients.

Lastly, the HA spokesperson appealed to the public to get vaccinated as early as possible. Members of the public who have not yet been vaccinated should grasp the opportunity to get vaccinated soon while vaccinated people should take a booster dose at an appropriate time to minimise the risk of infection or developing severe symptoms if infected.