

Centre for Food Safety announces test results of Lunar New Year food (first phase)

The Centre for Food Safety (CFS) of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department today (January 16) announced the test results of a recently completed seasonal food surveillance project on Lunar New Year (LNY) food (first phase). The test results of around 420 samples collected were satisfactory except for one sample that was announced earlier.

A spokesman for the CFS said, "The LNY is coming soon and the CFS is conducting this seasonal food surveillance project in two phases. During the first phase of the project, different types of LNY food including steamed puddings (e.g. turnip puddings and festive cakes), fried dumplings (e.g. sesame balls and crispy triangles), candies, glutinous rice balls, nuts, melon seeds and dried aquatic products were collected from different retailers (including online retailers) for chemical and microbiological tests as well as nutrition content analysis."

Chemical tests targeted preservatives, metallic contaminants, sweeteners and others. Microbiological tests covered different food poisoning pathogens. For nutrition content analysis, the contents of total fat, sodium and sugars of the samples were tested to see if the test results were consistent with the declared values on the nutrition labels.

The unsatisfactory food sample was a prepackaged fresh bean curd sticks sample in breach of the food labelling regulation. The CFS has taken follow-up action on the above-mentioned unsatisfactory sample including informing the vendor concerned of the test result, instructing them to stop selling the affected food item and mounting a recall, and tracing the source of the food item in question.

The spokesman urged the food trade to observe the relevant laws and regulations in the preparation of food, follow Good Manufacturing Practice and use permitted food additives only in an appropriate manner. Retailers should source food from reliable suppliers, and conduct quality checks of incoming materials and end products to ensure that ingredients used are within legal standards. In addition, the food trade should maintain proper records in accordance with the requirements of the Food Safety Ordinance to allow source tracing if needed.

The spokesman also advised consumers to buy LNY food from reliable retailers with good hygiene conditions; make sure the packaging of prepackaged cakes and snacks is intact and the products have not expired; refer to the nutrition labels on the sugar, salt (sodium) and fat content and more for making healthy choices; and pay attention to the hygiene conditions of food containers and the personal hygiene of staff when buying loose-packed

foods (e.g. candied lotus seeds, nuts and melon seeds).

"Consumers should choose food products with natural colours. Bright white pistachios may have been bleached and melon seeds with an unnatural gloss may have had mineral oil added. Consumption of these food products can cause gastrointestinal discomfort," the spokesman said.

"Festive cakes that are not for immediate consumption should be kept refrigerated or stored according to the instructions on the package, and should be eaten before they expire. Reheat hot-served festive cakes thoroughly before consumption, consume them as soon as possible, and avoid keeping them at room temperature for a long time. Foods like nuts and melon seeds should not be kept for a long time. Those with mould or an abnormal smell or taste should not be eaten," he added.

The spokesman reminded the public to maintain a balanced diet and avoid foods that are high in energy, sugar, salt or fat during the LNY.

The CFS will continue to conduct surveillance on LNY food and the second-phase results will be released in a timely manner to ensure food safety.

Please visit the CFS website (www.cfs.gov.hk/seasonalfood) for more food safety information about seasonal food.