

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

The Centre for Food Safety (CFS) of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department today (January 4) announced the test results of a recently completed seasonal food surveillance project on Lunar New Year (LNY) food (first phase). The test results on around 420 samples collected were satisfactory, except for a candied lotus seed sample found to contain a preservative at a level exceeding the legal limit, which was announced earlier.

A spokesman for the CFS said, "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), candied fruits, glutinous rice balls, 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 (e.g. sulphur dioxide, benzoic acid and sorbic acid), colouring matters (e.g. Sudan dyes) and metallic contaminants (e.g. cadmium, mercury and arsenic). Microbiological tests covered different food poisoning pathogens, such as salmonella, *Clostridium perfringens*, *Bacillus cereus* and coagulase-positive staphylococci organisms. 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 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 healthy choices; and pay attention to the hygiene conditions of food containers and the personal hygiene of staff when buying loose-packed food (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 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 food thoroughly before consumption. Discard those with mould or an abnormal smell or taste. Leftovers should not be stored in the refrigerator for longer than three days and should not be reheated more than once. Foods like nuts and melon seeds should not be kept for a long time and mouldy ones 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 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.