

CFS announces food safety report for December 2019 and summary of food surveillance programme for 2019

The Centre for Food Safety (CFS) of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department today (January 31) released the findings of its food safety report for last month (December 2019). The results of about 14 200 food samples tested were found to be satisfactory except for 11 unsatisfactory samples which were announced earlier. The overall satisfactory rate was 99.9 per cent.

A CFS spokesman said about 1 200 food samples were collected for microbiological tests, some 3 700 samples were taken for chemical tests and the remaining 9 300 (including about 8 400 taken from food imported from Japan) were collected to test radiation levels.

The microbiological tests covered pathogens and hygienic indicators, while the chemical tests included pesticides, preservatives, metallic contaminants, colouring matters, veterinary drug residues and others.

The samples comprised about 3 100 samples of vegetables and fruit and their products; 700 samples of cereals, grains and their products; 800 samples of meat and poultry and their products; 700 samples of milk, milk products and frozen confections; 1 900 samples of aquatic and related products; and 7 000 samples of other food commodities (including beverages, bakery products and snacks).

The 11 unsatisfactory samples comprised two Chinese cabbage samples and two celery samples detected with cadmium exceeding the legal limits; two swordfish samples and a tuna sample found to contain excessive methylmercury; a Chinese wolfberry leaf sample detected with lead exceeding the legal limit; a vegetable sample detected with pesticide residue exceeding the legal limit; a bamboo fungi sample found to contain excessive preservative and a tinned lettuce sample found to contain sulphite not declared on its food label.

The CFS has taken follow-up actions on the unsatisfactory samples including informing the vendors concerned of the test results, instructing them to stop selling the affected food items and tracing the sources of the food items in question.

Since the Pesticide Residues in Food Regulation (Cap 132CM) came into effect on August 1, 2014, as of December 31 last year, the CFS had taken over 193 800 food samples at import, wholesale and retail levels for testing for pesticide residues. The overall unsatisfactory rate is less than 0.2 per cent.

The spokesman added that excessive pesticide residues in food may arise

from the trade not observing Good Agricultural Practice, e.g. using excessive pesticides and/or not allowing sufficient time for pesticides to decompose before harvesting. The maximum residue limits (MRLs) of pesticide residues in food set in the Regulation are not safety indicators. They are the maximum concentrations of pesticide residues permitted in a food commodity under Good Agricultural Practice when applying pesticides. In this connection, consumption of food with pesticide residues higher than the MRLs will not necessarily lead to any adverse health effects.

The spokesman reminded the food trade to ensure that food is fit for human consumption and meets legal requirements. Consumers should patronise reliable shops when buying food and maintain a balanced diet to minimise food risks.

Summary of food surveillance programme for 2019

Concluding the food surveillance programme for 2019, the spokesman said that apart from routine food surveillance, the CFS conducted a number of targeted as well as seasonal and popular food surveillance projects.

"In addition to about 97 000 samples of imported Japanese food taken for testing of radiation levels in response to the Fukushima nuclear power plant incident in Japan, about 66 000 samples were tested by the CFS last year. The overall satisfactory rate was 99.8 per cent, which was comparable to the results in recent years. This indicates that food safety has been maintained at a high standard in Hong Kong," he said.

"The exceedances or breaches for most of the unsatisfactory samples were not serious and would not pose adverse health effects to the general public. For individual food items with unsatisfactory test results, the CFS has taken prompt and effective risk management action to safeguard public health," he said.

He added that in planning the food surveillance programme, the CFS would always take into consideration a number of factors such as the food consumption level and the risk of the food concerned in deciding on the number of samples to be tested and the frequency of sampling as well as the testing parameters. In addition, the CFS would also adjust its food surveillance programmes and strengthen relevant testing with regard to local and overseas food incidents as well as past surveillance data, in particular breaches of regulatory requirements that occurred more frequently, so as to safeguard food safety in Hong Kong.