

CFS announces results of targeted surveillance on Listeria monocytogenes in ready-to-eat food

The Centre for Food Safety (CFS) of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department today (July 20) announced the results of a recently completed targeted food surveillance project on *Listeria monocytogenes* in ready-to-eat food. All samples passed the test.

The CFS collected a total of 500 samples of ready-to-eat food from different retail outlets, including online retailers and food factories for testing of *Listeria monocytogenes* this year. The samples included various types of high-risk food, such as cheese, frozen confections, cold cuts, fruit, salad, sashimi, smoked salmon and other smoked seafood.

"*Listeria monocytogenes* can be killed under normal cooking temperatures. However, unlike other food-poisoning bacteria, it can grow slowly at refrigerated temperatures as low as 0 degrees Celsius. Therefore, refrigerated ready-to-eat food with a long shelf life (over five days) is a potential high-risk item for listeriosis," a spokesman for the CFS said.

Listeriosis is usually caused by eating food contaminated with *Listeria monocytogenes*. Most healthy individuals do not develop symptoms or only have mild symptoms such as fever, muscle pain, headache, nausea, vomiting or diarrhoea when infected. However, severe complications such as septicemia, meningitis or even death may occur in newborns, the elderly and those with weaker immune systems. Although infected pregnant women may just experience mild symptoms generally, the infection of *Listeria monocytogenes* may cause miscarriage, infant death, preterm birth, or severe infection in newborns.

The spokesman reminded the public to maintain good personal and food hygiene to ensure food safety. To reduce the risk of listeriosis, those belonging to high-risk groups, i.e. pregnant women, infants, the elderly, chronic disease patients and those with weaker immune systems, should avoid eating high-risk food, including refrigerated ready-to-eat food with a long shelf life (over five days) (such as smoked salmon, smoked ham and cooked deli meats), cheese made with unpasteurised milk (including soft and semi-soft cheese), and pre-made or prepackaged salads. Moreover, the food trade, such as restaurants, can indicate dishes containing raw or undercooked ingredients on menus to help consumers make informed choices.

The CFS will continue to promote food safety education to the public and other stakeholders through various channels to strengthen public knowledge on food safety. The Centre will also enhance communication with the food trade to raise food safety standards.