

CFS announces test results of targeted surveillance on use of sulphur dioxide in meat (with photo)

The Centre for Food Safety (CFS) of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department today (February 14) released the test results of a targeted food surveillance project on the use of sulphur dioxide in meat. Among 550 samples tested, except for five samples found to contain sulphur dioxide (a non-permitted preservative in fresh meat) which have been announced, all the remaining samples passed the test. The overall satisfactory rate was 99 per cent.

"In view of the detection of the preservative in fresh meat samples in the past, the CFS has all along been conducting targeted surveillance projects regularly on the use of such a chemical in meat in recent years. Samples of beef, pork and mutton were collected according to a risk-based approach from fresh provision shops, supermarkets, market meat stalls and online retailers for testing." a spokesman for the CFS said.

Sulphur dioxide is a preservative which can be used in a variety of foods including dried fruits, pickled vegetables and meat products such as sausages and grilled burgers. Under the Preservatives in Food Regulation (Cap. 132BD), it is not permitted in fresh or chilled meat. Nonetheless, individual meat traders were found illegally using sulphur dioxide to make meat look fresher. Sulphur dioxide is water-soluble, and most of it can be removed through washing and cooking. However, susceptible individuals who are allergic to sulphur dioxide may experience breathing difficulties, headaches and nausea after consumption.

Under the Regulation, the maximum penalty upon conviction of using sulphur dioxide in fresh or chilled meat is a fine of \$50,000 and six months' imprisonment.

The spokesman reminded the food trade to comply with the law and not to sell fresh or chilled meat containing sulphur dioxide. Members of the public should patronise reliable vendors and avoid buying or consuming meat which is unnaturally red.

