

CFS announces test results on Lunar New Year food (second phase)

The Centre for Food Safety (CFS) of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department today (January 21) announced the test results of a recently completed seasonal food surveillance project on Lunar New Year (LNY) food (second phase). Among the 94 samples collected for testing, except for a sample of prepackaged dates in breach of food labelling regulations and a sample of sweetened winter-melon detected with a preservative exceeding the legal limit, both of which were announced earlier, the test results were satisfactory.

A spokesman for the CFS said, "The CFS announced the first-phase test results on LNY food earlier this month. As the LNY is around the corner, the CFS has completed the second phase of the surveillance 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, melon seeds and dried aquatic products, were collected from different retailers (including online retailers) for chemical and nutrition content analysis."

Chemical tests targeted preservatives, colouring matters, antioxidants, veterinary drug residue, etc. For nutrition content analysis, contents of energy, carbohydrates, protein, total fat, saturated fatty acids, trans fatty acids, sodium and sugars of the samples were tested to see if the test results comply with their declared values on the nutrition labels.

The spokesman urged the food trade to comply with 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, etc, for making 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, consume as soon as possible and avoid prolonged exposure of food at room temperature. 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 CFS spokesman reminded members of the public to maintain a balanced diet and avoid excessive consumption of LNY food that are high in energy, sugar, salt or fat.

Please visit the CFS website (www.cfs.gov.hk) for more food safety tips.