

CFS proactively follows up on packaging surface of food sample testing positive for COVID-19 virus

The Centre for Food Safety (CFS) of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department today (June 16) said that, upon receiving a notification from the Centre for Health Protection of the Department of Health earlier that among the environmental samples collected at the residence of a confirmed patient of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19), a sample from the packaging of prepackaged frozen crocodile spare ribs imported from Thailand was found to be positive for the COVID-19 virus, the CFS immediately collected a total of 103 samples from crocodile products, which included 41 food swabs and 62 packaging swabs, from storage points/warehouses and retail outlets of the vendor concerned for testing. Results showed that all samples were found to be negative for the COVID-19 virus.

Given the conclusion of the test results, the CFS considers that the sample from the packaging of the frozen crocodile spare ribs collected at the residence and found to be positive for the COVID-19 virus is more likely to have been contaminated at the residence of the confirmed patient. The CFS has informed the vendor concerned of the above-mentioned test results and that it may resume sale of the product concerned.

According to current scientific knowledge, the World Health Organization and food safety assessment authorities in overseas countries considered that it is unlikely that a novel coronavirus can be transmitted to humans via food consumption. Nevertheless, members of the public should always observe personal, food and environmental hygiene. The CFS reminds the public to pay attention to the following:

- Always keep hands clean, particularly before touching the mouth, nose or eyes; before and after handling chilled and frozen food and its packaging, if any; after going to the toilet; and before eating. Rub hands with liquid soap for at least 20 seconds when washing;
- Handle raw and cooked food separately, and pay special attention when handling raw meat and offal, to avoid cross-contamination of food; and
- Cook food thoroughly and avoid consuming raw or undercooked animal products.

To prevent the import of the COVID-19 virus through imported frozen foods, the CFS has stepped up precautionary testing measures, including enhanced testing of various types of frozen foods and their packaging imported from different countries/regions, which involves taking samples at the Airport Food Inspection Offices and cold stores of importers. Moreover, the CFS will continue the surveillance on imported frozen foods and their packaging to closely monitor the risk of the spread of the COVID-19 virus

through imported frozen foods.