

CFS reminds public to pay more attention to food safety risks in summer

The Centre for Food Safety (CFS) of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) today (July 20) released the findings of its Summer Food Surveillance Programme 2021. The results of over 2 000 food samples tested were satisfactory except for three samples that had been announced earlier. The overall satisfactory rate was 99.85 per cent. A CFS spokesman reminded members of the public to remain vigilant and pay more attention to food safety and environmental hygiene as the hot and humid climate of summer in Hong Kong facilitates the multiplication of bacteria.

The spokesman said, "The CFS collected 2 002 samples from market stalls, restaurants, food factories, fresh provision shops, online vendors, hawkers and premises in connection with intelligence, etc for tests."

The samples comprised 180 samples of dairy products and frozen confections, 138 samples of cut fruit and salads, 97 samples of desserts and drinks, 54 samples of sandwiches, 251 samples of cooked meat products and 551 samples of other ready to eat foods. The CFS was notified of multiple food poisoning cases which involved consumption of raw oysters this summer and therefore enhanced the testing of aquatic products. A total of 731 samples of aquatic products such as sushi and sashimi, fish, crustaceans (such as shrimp and scampi), molluscs and other edible aquatic animals (such as oysters and venus clams) were collected for tests.

The spokesman said that 1 800 food samples were collected for microbiological tests, 132 samples for tests of metallic contaminants and 70 samples for tests of veterinary drug residues. Samples tested for microbiological tests and metallic contaminants were all satisfactory. As for the tests of veterinary drug residues, except for three samples (one for venus clam, one for clam and one for common oriental clam) in which chloramphenicol were found, the remaining samples were all satisfactory. The overall satisfactory rate was 99.85 per cent.

The CFS has announced the test results of the unsatisfactory samples and conducted follow-up actions, including instructing the concerned vendors to stop sales and remove the products from the shelves, tracing the source and informing the authority of the origin.

The spokesman pointed out that although unsatisfactory samples for microbiological tests were not found in the Summer Food Surveillance Programme 2021, bacteria grow faster in warmer environments in summer, and that the hot weather increases the risk of food poisoning caused by bacteria.

The spokesman reminded members of the public in particular that raw or

undercooked foods are high-risk foods as there is not any, or inadequate, heat treatment to eliminate the microorganisms present that can pose risks to human health. Raw or undercooked foods are also associated with the risk of contracting antimicrobial resistance (AMR) microorganisms. Although these AMR microorganisms may not cause illnesses, they may transfer their antibiotic resistance genes to other bacteria inside the human body, therefore affecting the effectiveness of the future use of antibiotics when needed. Susceptible populations such as pregnant women, young children, the elderly and people with weakened immunity (i.e. people with chronic diseases or those on antibiotics treatment, antacid and long-term steroids or drugs given to prevent transplant rejection, etc) are of higher risk of being infected or having complications if they consume raw or undercooked foods due to their health status. They should therefore avoid eating raw and undercooked foods.

Members of the public should pay attention to food safety, especially in summer, and observe the following Five Keys to Food Safety in order to reduce the risk of foodborne diseases:

- choose (choose safe raw materials);
- clean (keep hands and utensils clean);
- separate (separate raw and cooked food);
- cook (cook thoroughly); and
- safe temperature (keep food at a safe temperature).

Members of the public are also reminded to dine out in licensed and hygienic restaurants. Food premises selling sushi and sashimi or other high risk food require a special permit. The public should patronise only those with relevant licences or permits issued by the FEHD.