

Chilled tuna sample imported from Japan detected with methylmercury exceeding legal limit

The Centre for Food Safety (CFS) of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department announced today (December 11) that a sample of chilled tuna imported from Japan was found to contain a metal contaminant, methylmercury, at a level exceeding the legal limit. The CFS is following up on the case.

A spokesman for the CFS said, "The CFS collected above-mentioned sample at import level for testing under its routine Food Surveillance Programme. The test result showed that it contained methylmercury at a level of 1.1 parts per million (ppm), exceeding the legal limit of 0.5 ppm."

The spokesman said the CFS had informed the importer concerned of the irregularity and had requested it to stop sale of the affected product.

"Methylmercury is the major form of mercury in fish. Mercury may affect the nervous system, particularly the developing brain. At high levels, mercury can affect foetal brain development, and affect vision, hearing, muscle co-ordination and memory in adults. Furthermore, as some international organisations such as the World Health Organization have pointed out, consuming predatory fish species is the main source of mercury intake for human beings. The report of the CFS' Total Diet Study has also pointed out that large fish or predatory fish species may contain high mercury levels (for example, tuna, alfonso, shark, swordfish, marlin, orange roughy and king mackerel). Hence, groups particularly susceptible to the adverse effects of mercury, such as pregnant women, women planning pregnancy and young children, should opt for fish that are smaller in size for consumption and avoid consumption of the above-mentioned types of fish which may contain high mercury levels. This is to minimise the health risk posed to the foetus, infants and young children by excessive exposure to metal contaminants in food," he added.

According to the Food Adulteration (Metallic Contamination) Regulations (Cap 132V), any person who sells food with metallic contamination above the legal limit may be prosecuted and is liable upon conviction to a fine of \$50,000 and imprisonment for six months.

"People are advised to maintain a balanced and varied diet. To avoid health risks posed by excessive intake of metallic contaminants, pregnant women, women planning pregnancy and young children should avoid eating large or predatory fish," the spokesman said.

The CFS will continue to follow up on the case and take appropriate action. Investigation is ongoing.