

CHP investigates three food poisoning clusters

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health is today (November 13) investigating three epidemiologically linked food poisoning clusters affecting 10 persons, and reminded the public to maintain personal, food and environmental hygiene to prevent foodborne diseases.

The first cluster involved two females aged 36 and 40, who developed abdominal pain, diarrhoea, nausea, vomiting, and fever about 17 hours after they bought lunch from Busan House located in Lok Fu and consumed at their workplace on November 7.

The second cluster involved four females aged between 30 and 46, who developed abdominal pain, diarrhoea, nausea and fever about 11 to 39 hours after they bought dinner from the same restaurant and consumed at their workplace on the same day.

The third cluster involved four females aged between 30 and 60, who developed abdominal pain, diarrhoea, nausea and fever about 15 to 24 hours after they bought lunch from the same restaurant and consumed at their workplace on November 8.

All of the affected persons sought medical advice. One of them required hospitalisation. Her stool specimen was positive for Salmonella upon laboratory testing. All patients are in stable condition.

Initial investigations by the CHP revealed that the affected persons had consumed common food and the food concerned was kimbap, which consisted of seaweed, shredded egg, cucumber and pickles.

Personnel from the CHP and the Centre for Food Safety (CFS) of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department have conducted an inspection at the restaurant, and instructed the premises concerned to suspend operation with immediate effect, carry out cleaning and disinfection of the premises and improve food preparation process and food hygiene. The officers have also provided health education related to food safety and environmental hygiene to the staff of the premises. The officers initially suspected that the food concerned was contaminated during the preparation process.

The CHP and CFS's investigation is ongoing and it cannot rule out that the number of cases will increase. The CHP appeals to the persons who have consumed the said food item from the aforementioned restaurant on November 7 or 8 to seek medical advice as soon as possible if they feel unwell.

To prevent foodborne diseases, members of the public are reminded to maintain personal, food and environmental hygiene at all times. When dining out:

- For dishes that often use lightly cooked or uncooked eggs, choose pasteurised eggs, egg products or dried egg powder;
- Patronise only reliable and licensed restaurants;
- Avoid eating raw seafood;
- Be a discerning consumer in choosing cold dishes, including sashimi, sushi and raw oysters, at a buffet;
- Pre-cooked or leftover foods should be stored and reheated properly before consumption;
- Ensure food is thoroughly cooked before eating during a hotpot or barbecue meal;
- Handle raw and cooked foods carefully and separate them completely during the cooking process;
- Use two sets of chopsticks and utensils to handle raw and cooked foods;
- Do not patronise illegal food hawkers;
- Drink boiled water;
- Do not try to use salt, vinegar, wine or wasabi to kill bacteria as they are not effective; and
- Always wash hands before eating and after going to the toilet.