

CHP investigates three food poisoning clusters

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health is today (January 15) investigating three epidemiologically linked food poisoning clusters tentatively found to affect 57 persons, and reminded the public to maintain personal, food and environmental hygiene to prevent foodborne diseases.

The three clusters involved 28 males and 29 females aged between 25 and 91, who developed abdominal pain, diarrhoea, nausea, vomiting and fever about eight to 74 hours after eating at the Golden Lilies International Banquet Hall in Wang Kwong Road, Kowloon Bay, on January 8, 9 and 12.

Of those affected, 34 persons sought medical advice, while two of them required hospitalisation and were discharged after treatment.

A preliminary investigation by the CHP revealed that the affected persons had consumed a variety of food items, including "siu mei", such as roasted piglet and chicken and other hot dishes. Staff of the CHP and the Centre for Food Safety (CFS) of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department have conducted an investigation at the restaurant, taken food samples for testing, and examined the cooking process and hygiene of the food.

The CFS's investigation revealed that the roasted piglet and chicken were prepared too early in advance and were not reheated before consumption. In addition, the risk of cross-contamination during the preparation process could not be ruled out. According to the established mechanism, the CFS immediately instructed the premises concerned to immediately stop serving all "siu mei" involved, suspend the operation of the "siu mei" section, clean and disinfect the premises, improve the food preparation process and hygiene, and provide food safety and environmental hygiene education to the restaurant staff.

The investigation of the CHP and CFS is ongoing. It cannot be ruled out that the number of affected persons may increase. The CHP appealed to those who dined at the Golden Lilies International Banquet Hall located on G/F, Skyline Tower, 39 Wang Kwong Road, Kowloon Bay, on the evening of January 8 or 9, or during lunchtime on January 12, and developed gastrointestinal symptoms, to call the CHP hotline (2125 2372) for follow up and medical surveillance. The hotline will operate until January 17 from 9am to 5pm. They should seek medical advice immediately if they develop symptoms of infection, such as fever or feeling unwell.

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

- Avoid eating raw seafood;
- Be a discerning consumer in choosing cold dishes, including sashimi, sushi and raw oysters at a buffet;
- Choose pasteurised eggs, egg products or dried egg powder for dishes that often use lightly cooked or uncooked eggs;
- Patronise only reliable and licensed restaurants;
- Store and reheat precooked or leftover foods 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;
- Avoid patronising illegal food hawkers;
- Drink boiled water;
- Refrain from trying 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.