

CHP investigates two catering food poisoning clusters

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health is today (December 17) investigating two epidemiologically linked food poisoning clusters affecting 41 persons, and reminded the public to take appropriate measures to safeguard food safety and prevent foodborne diseases when patronising catering services.

The first cluster involved one male and 11 females aged between 20 and 50, who developed abdominal pain and diarrhoea about two to 15 hours after consuming catering food bought from Cateraway, a food factory in Kwun Tong, on the night of December 13.

The other cluster involved seven males and 22 females, aged between 5 and 77, who developed the same symptoms about three to 18 hours after consuming catering food bought from the same food factory on the same day.

Among the 41 affected persons, one of them sought medical advice. None required hospitalisation.

Initial investigations by the CHP revealed that the affected persons had consumed common foods, and the foods concerned were scallop and seafood pizza with thousand island dressing, spaghetti with mentaiko cuttlefish in creamy chili sauce and food items with black truffles sauce. The incident might have been caused by *clostridium perfringens*.

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, took food samples for testing, and instructed the premises concerned to suspend business and the sale of relevant food, carry out cleaning and disinfection of the premises, as well as improve food preparation process. 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 prepared too early in advance and was stored under improper temperatures.

The CHP and CFS's investigation is ongoing and it cannot rule out that the number of cases will increase.

A spokesman for the CHP said that with the festivals approaching, many people would choose to patronise catering services. To ensure food safety and prevent foodborne illnesses, members of the public should pay attention to the following key tips:

- Choose reputable licensed caterers to ensure food quality and safety;
- Arrange for reasonable delivery times, e.g. require catered food to be delivered one hour before serving to maintain optimal temperatures;

- Keep hot food above 60 degrees Celsius and cold food below 4 degrees Celsius. Check food for signs of spoilage, such as unusual odors or changes in texture;
- Handle leftovers properly. Refrigerate leftovers within two hours of serving and make sure the food is adequately reheated again before serving;
- Recognise symptoms of food poisoning, such as abdominal pain, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea and fever, and seek medical attention if the above symptoms occur.

Furthermore, 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.