

Dried shrimp sample and fresh pork sample found to contain sulphur dioxide

The Centre for Food Safety (CFS) of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department announced today (December 27) that a loose-packed dried shrimp sample was found to contain a preservative, sulphur dioxide, at a level exceeding the legal limit, and a fresh pork sample was found to contain sulphur dioxide which is not permitted to be used in fresh meat. The CFS is following up on the cases.

A spokesman for the CFS said, "Subsequent to announcing earlier that a dried shrimp sample taken from a retail outlet in Tin Shui Wai was found to contain excessive sulphur dioxide, and a fresh pork sample taken from a fresh provision shop in Sha Tin was detected with sulphur dioxide, the CFS took a dried shrimp sample of the same kind and another fresh pork sample from the two premises respectively for testing during follow-up investigations. Similar irregularities were detected. The dried shrimp sample was detected with sulphur dioxide at a level of 72 parts per million (ppm), exceeding the legal limit of 30 ppm while the fresh pork sample was found to contain the preservative at a level of 14 ppm."

The spokesman said that according to the Preservatives in Food Regulation (Cap 132BD), it is an offence to add sulphur dioxide to fresh or chilled meat. Should preservatives be added to food allowed with such addition, the use must comply with the Regulation. Offenders are liable to a maximum penalty of \$50,000 fine and six months' imprisonment upon conviction.

The CFS is tracing the sources of the affected products. Should there be sufficient evidence, prosecution will be instituted.

Sulphur dioxide is a commonly used preservative in a variety of foods including dried vegetables, dried fruits, pickled vegetables, salted fish products and meat products such as sausages and grilled burgers. Individual meat traders have been found illegally using sulphur dioxide to make meat look fresher. This preservative is of low toxicity. As it is water soluble, most of it can be removed through washing and cooking. However, susceptible individuals who are allergic to this preservative may experience breathing difficulties, headache and nausea.

The CFS will continue to follow up on the cases and take appropriate action. Investigation is on-going.