

# Excessive preservative found in dried apricot and preserved leaf mustard samples and in breach of food labelling regulation

The Centre for Food Safety (CFS) of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department announced today (August 9) that a loose-pack dried apricot sample and a prepackaged preserved leaf mustard sample were found to contain a preservative, sulphur dioxide, at levels exceeding the legal limits, and the preservative was not declared on the food label of the prepackaged preserved leaf mustard sample. The CFS is following up on the cases.

Details of the product of preserved leaf mustard are as follows:

Product name: Chinese Sauerkraut

Hong Kong distributor: Not available in English

Net weight: 225 grams per box

Best-before date: September 27, 2018

"The CFS collected the above-mentioned dried apricot and preserved leaf mustard samples from two supermarkets located respectively in Tai Po and Sha Tin for testing under its routine Food Surveillance Programme. The test results showed that the dried apricot sample contained sulphur dioxide at a level of 2 700 parts per million (ppm), exceeding the legal limit of 2 000 ppm, whereas the preserved leaf mustard sample contained sulphur dioxide at a level of 240 ppm, exceeding the legal limit of 100 ppm, and the preservative was not declared on the food label," the spokesman said.

The CFS has informed the vendors concerned of the irregularities and the vendors have stopped selling and removed from shelves the affected batches of the products according to the CFS' instructions. The CFS is also tracing the source and distribution 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 and meat products. This preservative is of low toxicity. As it is water soluble, most of it can be removed through washing and cooking. Occasional consumption of the abovementioned dried apricot with sulphur dioxide is unlikely to pose any adverse health effect to consumers. However, long term consumption may affect the digestive system. Based on the level of sulphur dioxide detected in the unsatisfactory sample of preserved leaf mustard, adverse health effects will not be caused under usual consumption. However, for individuals who are allergic to this preservative, there may be symptoms of shortness of breath, headache and nausea. The public are advised to seek medical treatment if they feel unwell after taking the food.

The spokesman reminded the food trade that the use of preservatives in food must comply with the Preservatives in Food Regulation (Cap 132BD). Furthermore, the Food and Drugs (Composition and Labelling) Regulations (Cap 132W) require that the food ingredients of all prepackaged food for sale in Hong Kong should be listed out on the list of ingredients (including additives). Offenders are liable to a maximum fine of \$50,000 and six months' imprisonment upon convictions. Members of the public should buy food from reliable suppliers, and maintain a balanced diet so as to avoid excessive intake of certain chemicals as a result of frequent consumption of a small range of food items.

The CFS will alert the trade, continue to follow up on the incidents and take appropriate actions. Investigation is ongoing.