

FEHD meets with school lunch box supplier to follow up on food quality issues (with photo)

The Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) attached great importance to the incident concerning food quality of school lunch boxes. The department convened a meeting this morning (February 20) with the meal box supplier, Luncheon Star, and requested the latter to give an account of its follow-up work in response to the incident. A representative of the Education Bureau also attended the meeting.

During the meeting, the FEHD was briefed by the supplier on its review and follow-up work after the incident, and the specific measures it will take to ensure food quality. The department has requested the supplier to submit a written report on the incident within days. It has also stressed that the supplier has the responsibility to improve the meal box production process and ensure food safety, and that the department will seriously handle any violation of the relevant requirements.

In parallel, test results of the samples collected by the FEHD last week have been obtained. Among the 11 food samples, nine were tested against food borne pathogens while the remaining two were tested to determine whether they were cooked. The test results are all satisfactory. Besides, the test results of all the 25 environmental swabs samples are also satisfactory.

After the incident came to the notice of the FEHD early last week, the department had contacted the school concerned immediately to learn more about the situation and arranged inspections to the licensed food factories of the supplier concerned in Sha Tin, Yuen Long, Eastern District and Kwun Tong, with food samples and environmental swabs samples collected for testing. The FEHD also received last week two suspected food poisoning outbreaks referred by the Centre for Health Protection of the Department of Health, involving the lunch boxes provided by the supplier concerned, and complaints about lunch boxes lodged by different schools. For the sake of prudence, the FEHD had ordered the supplier to stop producing and supplying the food in question until the investigation was completed.

A spokesman for the FEHD said, "The supplier concerned earlier announced that it would suspend the supply of meal boxes to schools today and tomorrow, so as to re-examine all production processes and conduct deep cleaning and disinfection of the food factories. The FEHD will arrange inspections to these food factories again to ensure that the relevant licensing conditions are observed and the hygienic standards stipulated in the laws are met."

"The FEHD will take into consideration the above-mentioned test results, the report to be submitted by the supplier and the results of rounds of inspections to decide whether further action has to be taken," the spokesman added.

Apart from the follow-up actions targeting the above-mentioned meal box supplier, with schools gradually resuming full-time face-to-face classes and arranging meals for students on campus, the FEHD has stepped up inspections since February 13 according to its earlier action plan to some 200 licensed food factories endorsed to supply school lunch boxes, and reminded operators of the proper way of handling school lunch boxes. The inspections will be completed within this week. The FEHD has also sent letters to school management and lunch box suppliers earlier, urging them to pay attention to the food safety of lunch boxes supplied to students. Moreover, the department will organise online trade talks to remind lunch box suppliers that they should follow good hygienic practices during food preparation and develop a food safety plan based on the Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point system.

The Centre for Food Safety (CFS) of the FEHD, through the routine food surveillance programme, has all along been taking food samples from local licensed food factories (including those endorsed to supply lunch boxes) for testing every year to ensure that the food complies with the legislative requirements and is fit for human consumption. In the past two years, the CFS collected 200 samples for microbiological testing from food factories endorsed to provide lunch boxes, among which eight were taken from the lunch box supplier concerned, and all results were found satisfactory.

