

Fish ball sample detected with methylmercury at level that may have breached Food Adulteration (Metallic Contamination) Regulations

The Centre for Food Safety (CFS) of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department today (December 31) announced that a loose-packed fish ball sample was detected with methylmercury, a metallic contaminant, at a level which may have contravened the Food Adulteration (Metallic Contamination) Regulations. The CFS is following up on the incident.

A spokesman for the CFS said, "When following up on a related incident, the CFS collected the above-mentioned sample from a restaurant in North Point for testing. The test result showed that the sample contained methylmercury at a level of 0.4 parts per million (ppm). The CFS' risk assessment revealed that if prolonged consumption of the compounded food occurs, the concerned metal level may pose adverse effect on health."

The spokesman said that the CFS had informed the restaurant concerned and the supplier of the product of the irregularity and had requested them to stop the sale of the affected product. Prosecution will be instituted should there be sufficient evidence.

"Methylmercury is the major form of mercury in fish. At high levels, mercury can affect foetal brain development, and affect vision, hearing, muscle co-ordination and memory in adults. Furthermore, as some international organisations such as the World Health Organization have pointed out, consuming predatory fish species is the main source of mercury intake for human beings. The report of the CFS' Total Diet Study has also pointed out that large fish or predatory fish species may contain high mercury levels (for example, tuna, alfonso, shark, swordfish, marlin, orange roughy and king mackerel). Hence, groups particularly susceptible to the adverse effects of mercury, such as pregnant women, women planning pregnancy and young children, should opt for fish that are smaller in size for consumption and avoid consumption of the above-mentioned types of fish to minimise excessive exposure to metal contaminants in food," he added.

According to the Food Adulteration (Metallic Contamination) Regulations (Cap. 132V), any person who sells food with metallic contamination in an amount that is dangerous or prejudicial to health is liable upon conviction to a fine of \$50,000 and imprisonment for six months.

The CFS will continue to follow up on the incident and take appropriate action. Investigation is ongoing.