Fresh pork sample found to contain sulphur dioxide

The Centre for Food Safety (CFS) of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department announced today (October 5) that a fresh pork sample was found to contain sulphur dioxide, a preservative which is not permitted to be used in fresh meat. The CFS is following up on the case.

A spokesman for the CFS said, "When following up on an earlier relevant incident, the CFS took the fresh pork sample from a fresh provision shop in Happy Valley for testing. The test result showed that the sample contained sulphur dioxide at a level of 170 parts per million. The CFS has informed the vendor concerned of the irregularity and will initiate prosecution should there be sufficient evidence."

According to the Preservatives in Food Regulation (Cap. 132BD), it is an offence to add sulphur dioxide to fresh or chilled meat. The maximum penalty is a $50,000 fine and six months' imprisonment.

Sulphur dioxide is a preservative which can be used in a variety of foods including dried vegetables, dried fruits, pickled vegetables and salted fish products, but under the Regulation it is not permitted in fresh or chilled meat. Individual meat traders have been found illegally using sulphur dioxide to make meat look fresher. Sulphur dioxide is water soluble, and 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 after consumption.

The spokesman reminded the food trade to comply with the law and not to sell fresh or chilled meat adulterated with sulphur dioxide. Members of the public should purchase meat from reliable market stalls or fresh provision shops. They should avoid buying or consuming meat which is unnaturally red and maintain a balanced diet to avoid malnutrition or excessive exposure to chemicals from a small range of food items.

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