

Packaging sample of imported frozen chicken leg tested positive for COVID-19 virus

A spokesman for the Centre for Food Safety (CFS) of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department said today (April 19) that the CFS received testing reports from the Department of Health that one packaging sample of imported frozen chicken leg was found to be positive for the COVID-19 virus during precautionary testing.

The CFS earlier collected six samples for testing from a batch of around 500 cartons of frozen chicken leg (total of around 7.5 tonnes) imported from Brazil via sea. Test results showed one inner packaging sample was found to be positive for the virus. This batch of chicken leg has been stored inside a warehouse in Kwai Chung after import and has not entered the market.

Upon learning of the test results, the CFS has inspected the warehouse and asked the operators to conduct thorough cleaning and disinfection. The CFS has ordered the importer concerned to dispose of the chicken leg of the same batch. In addition, the CFS will step up sampling of similar products for testing.

To prevent the import of the COVID-19 virus through imported frozen foods, the CFS has stepped up precautionary testing measures since mid-2020, including enhanced testing of various types of frozen foods and their packaging imported from different countries/regions, which involves taking samples at the Airport Food Inspection Offices and cold stores of importers. Up to now, over 30 000 samples of foods and their packaging were collected for testing for the virus. Apart from the above-mentioned sample, only the pomfret fish and packaging samples announced last August, the cuttlefish slice and packaging samples announced last November, the packaging samples of beef and pork skin announced this February, and the packaging sample of ox offal announced this April were found to be positive. The CFS will continue the sampling of imported frozen foods and their packaging for testing. During testing, the products being tested will be held in the warehouse. They will be released to the market for sale only if the result is completed and showing a negative result. This would ensure affected products will not be distributed to the market for sale.

The COVID-19 virus is predominantly transmitted through droplets and cannot multiply in food or food packaging. According to current scientific knowledge, the World Health Organization and food safety assessment authorities in overseas countries consider that it is unlikely that the COVID-19 virus can be transmitted to humans via food consumption. Nevertheless, members of the public should always observe personal, food and environmental hygiene. The CFS reminds the public to pay attention to the following:

- * Always keep hands clean, particularly before touching the mouth, nose or eyes;
- * Rub hands with liquid soap for at least 20 seconds when washing before and after handling chilled and frozen food and its packaging, if any; after going to the toilet; and before eating;
- * Handle raw and cooked food separately, and pay special attention when handling raw meat and offal, to avoid cross-contamination of food; and
- * Cook food thoroughly and avoid consuming raw or undercooked animal products.