

Packaging sample of imported frozen ox offal tests positive for COVID-19 virus

A spokesman for the Centre for Food Safety (CFS) of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department said today (April 6) that the CFS received test reports from the Department of Health that one packaging sample of imported frozen ox offal was found to be positive for the COVID-19 virus during precautionary testing.

The CFS earlier collected three samples for testing from a batch of 19 cartons of frozen ox offal (total of around 410 kilograms) imported from Brazil via sea. Test results showed that one outer packaging sample was found to be positive for the virus. This batch of ox offal has been stored inside a warehouse in Tuen Mun after import, and has not entered the market.

Upon learning the test results, the CFS has inspected the warehouses and asked the operator to conduct a thorough cleaning and disinfection. The CFS has ordered the importer concerned to dispose of the ox offal 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 have been collected for testing of the virus. Apart from the abovementioned samples, only the pomfret fish and packaging samples announced last August, the cuttlefish slice and packaging samples announced last November, and the packaging samples of beef and pork skin announced this February 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 shows a negative result. This will ensure that 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.