

Prepackaged date sample in breach of food labelling regulation

The Centre for Food Safety (CFS) of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department announced today (August 28) that a sample of prepackaged dates was found to contain sulphur dioxide, a preservative which is allowed to be used in certain foods, but the functional class and the name of the additive were not declared on the food label. Members of the public should not consume the affected batch of the product. The trade should also stop using or selling the affected batch of the product immediately if they possess it.

Product details are as follows:

Product name: (Not available in English)
Brand: (Not available in English)
Place of origin: China
Net weight: 300 grams
Best-before date: July 1, 2024
Distributor: (Not available in English)

"The CFS collected the above-mentioned sample from an online vendor for testing under its routine Food Surveillance Programme. The test result showed that the sample contained sulphur dioxide. Although the sulphur dioxide level is below the maximum permitted level under the Preservatives in Food Regulation (Cap. 132BD), the functional class and the name of the additive were not declared on the food label of the sample," a spokesman for the CFS said.

"The CFS has informed the online vendor and distributor concerned of the irregularities and instructed them to stop sale and remove from shelves the affected batch of the product. The distributor concerned has initiated a recall according to the CFS's instructions. Members of the public may call its hotline at 6098 7030 during office hours for enquiries about the recall," the spokesman added.

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. 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 that the use of preservatives in food must comply with the Preservatives in Food Regulation (Cap. 132BD). Furthermore, the Food and Drugs (Composition and Labelling) Regulations (Cap. 132W) require that for all prepackaged food for sale in Hong Kong containing sulphite in a concentration of 10 parts per million or more, the functional class of the sulphite and its name shall be specified in the list of ingredients. Offenders are liable to a maximum fine of \$50,000 and six

months' imprisonment upon conviction.

The CFS will alert the trade, continue to follow up on the incident and take appropriate action. The investigation is ongoing.