

Prepackaged date sample in breach of food labelling regulation

The Centre for Food Safety (CFS) of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department announced today (January 5) that a prepackaged date sample was found to contain sulphur dioxide and sorbic acid, preservatives which are allowed to be used in food, but the functional class and names of them were not declared on the product's food label, in breach of the food labelling regulations. Follow-up is in progress.

Product details are as follows:

Product name: (Not available in English)

Place of origin: China

Distributor: Premier Food Ltd

Net weight: 450 grams per pack

Best-before date: December 31, 2021

"Subsequent to announcing earlier that a prepackaged date sample taken from an online shop was detected with excessive preservative and in breach of the food labelling regulation, the CFS took another date sample from the same distributor from a shop in a shopping centre in West Kowloon for testing during follow-up investigations. The test result showed that the sample contained sorbic acid at a level of 69 parts per million (ppm) and sulphur dioxide at a level of 41 ppm. Although the levels are within the legal limits, the functional class and names of the two additives were not declared on the food label of the sample," a CFS spokesman said.

"The CFS has informed the vendor concerned of the irregularity. The distributor concerned has initiated a recall on the affected batch of the product according to the CFS's instructions. Members of the public may call its hotline at 2291 6216 during office hours for enquiries about the recall. Prosecution will be instituted should there be sufficient evidence," the spokesman added.

Sulphur dioxide is a commonly used preservative 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, headaches 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 prepackaged food shall be legibly marked or labelled with a list of ingredients. The regulations also state that for all prepackaged food for sale in Hong Kong containing sulphite in a concentration of 10 ppm 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. Investigation is ongoing.