

Preserved leaf mustard samples detected with excessive preservative and in breach of food labelling regulation

The Centre for Food Safety (CFS) of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department announced today (November 20) that two prepackaged preserved leaf mustard samples were found to contain a preservative, sulphur dioxide, at levels exceeding the legal limit, and the preservative was not declared on the food labels. The CFS is following up on the cases.

Details of the product are as follows:

Product name: Shantou Pickles
Product brand: Not available in English
Place of Origin: China
Manufacturer: Not available in English
Net weight: 250 grams
Best-before date: December 31, 2019

"The CFS collected the above-mentioned preserved leaf mustard samples from two supermarkets located in Mong Kok and Cheung Sha Wan for testing under its routine Food Surveillance Programme. The test results showed that the samples contained sulphur dioxide at respective levels of 339 parts per million (ppm) and 306 ppm, exceeding the legal limit of 100 ppm. The preservative was also not declared on the food labels of the samples," the spokesman said.

The CFS has informed the vendors concerned of the irregularities and they have stopped sale and removed from shelves the affected batch of the product according to the CFS' instructions. The CFS is also tracing the source of the affected product.

Sulphur dioxide is a commonly used preservative in a variety of foods including dried vegetables, dried fruits, pickled vegetables and meat products. This preservative is of low toxicity. As it is water soluble, 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 the food ingredients of all prepackaged food for sale in Hong Kong should be listed out on 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 incidents and take appropriate actions. Investigation is ongoing.