

Public consultation on strengthening regulation of harmful substances in food to end on March 15

The public consultation on strengthening the regulation of harmful substances such as industrially-produced trans fats and mycotoxins in food will end in three weeks (March 15). The Government today (February 22) called on members of the trade and the public to provide their views promptly on the proposals put forward in the consultation document.

A Government spokesman said, "We published the public consultation document on December 11 last year on the proposed amendments to the Harmful Substances in Food Regulations (the Regulations). In formulating the proposed amendments, the Government had been in close liaison with relevant stakeholders of the trade, including food importers, distributors, manufacturers and catering businesses. Since the consultation began, the Centre for Food Safety of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department has held two consultation forums by videoconferencing and other virtual meetings with relevant sectors of the trade on areas such as laboratory testing. Members of the trade and the public generally concur with the direction of the proposed amendments thus far. We will consider the views received carefully, with an aim to introduce relevant amendments to the subsidiary legislation into the Legislative Council within this year."

The Government's proposed amendments include updating and strengthening the regulatory control of three types of mycotoxins, i.e. aflatoxins, deoxynivalenol (also known as vomitoxin) and patulin, in food; as well as setting or updating the maximum levels for five other harmful substances (i.e. benzo[a]pyrene, glycidyl fatty acid esters, melamine, 3-monochloropropane-1,2-diol and erucic acid) in edible fats and oils, condiments or formula products intended for infants.

In the consultation document, the Government also proposes to regard partially hydrogenated oils (PHOs), i.e. the main source of industrially-produced trans fatty acids, as a prohibited substance in food, prohibiting the import of any edible fats and oils containing PHOs and the sale of any food (including edible fats and oils) containing PHOs under the Regulations. It is also proposed that if any prepackaged food contains hydrogenated oils, it must be indicated accordingly in the list of ingredients.

The Government proposes to allow a grace period of 18 months for the Amendment Regulations to be gazetted to come into force, so that stakeholders such as the food trade and the private testing and laboratory sector will have reasonable time to get prepared for the updated food safety standards.

Comments and views can be sent before the end of the consultation by post to 43/F, Queensway Government Offices, 66 Queensway, Hong Kong; by fax to 2893 3547; or by email to harmful-sub-consultation@fehd.gov.hk. The

consultation document is available at the website of the Food and Health Bureau (www.fhb.gov.hk) and the designated webpage of the Centre for Food Safety of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (www.cfs.gov.hk/harmfulsubstance).