

Sample of prepackaged frozen green wrasse fillet detected with methylmercury exceeding legal limit

The Centre for Food Safety (CFS) of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department announced today (July 16) that a sample of prepackaged frozen green wrasse fillet imported from New Zealand was found to contain a metal contaminant, methylmercury, at a level exceeding the legal limit. The CFS is following up on the case.

Product details are as follows:

Product name: (Not available in English)
Place of origin: New Zealand
Distributor: New Kwok Wah
Importer: Ocean Harvest Frozen Food Ltd
Best-before date: December 17, 2020

"Subsequent to announcing earlier that a sample of prepackaged frozen green wrasse fillet taken from a fresh provision shop in Wan Chai was found to contain mercury at a level exceeding the legal limit, the CFS detected a similar irregularity in another sample of another batch of the same product taken from the same shop for testing during follow-up investigation. The test result showed that it contained methylmercury at a level of 1.1 parts per million (ppm), exceeding the legal limit of 0.5 ppm," a CFS spokesman said.

"The CFS has informed the vendor concerned of the irregularity and instructed it to stop sale and remove from shelves all batches of the affected product. The importer concerned has initiated a recall according to the CFS' instructions. Members of the public may call the importer's hotline at 2563 8878 during office hours for enquiries about the recall. The CFS is also tracing the source of the affected product. Prosecution will be instituted should there be sufficient evidence," the spokesman added.

"Methylmercury is the major form of mercury in fish. Mercury may affect the nervous system, particularly the developing brain. At high levels, mercury can affect foetal brain development, and affect vision, hearing, muscle co-ordination and memory in adults. Furthermore, as some international organisations such as the World Health Organization have pointed out, consuming predatory fish species is the main source of mercury intake for human beings. The report of the CFS' Total Diet Study has also pointed out that large fish or predatory fish species may contain high mercury levels (for example, tuna, alfonso, shark, swordfish, marlin, orange roughy and king mackerel). Hence, groups particularly susceptible to the adverse effects of mercury, such as pregnant women, women planning pregnancy and young children, should opt for fish that are smaller in size for consumption and avoid consumption of the above-mentioned types of fish which may contain high mercury levels to minimise the health risk posed to the foetus, infants and

young children by excessive exposure to metal contaminants in food," he added.

According to the Food Adulteration (Metallic Contamination) Regulations (Cap 132V), any person who sells food with metallic contamination above the legal limit may be prosecuted and is liable upon conviction to a fine of \$50,000 and imprisonment for six months.

"People are advised to maintain a balanced and varied diet. To avoid health risks posed by excessive intake of metallic contaminants, the public, especially pregnant women, women planning pregnancy and young children, should avoid eating large or predatory fish," the spokesman said.

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