

# CFS urges public not to consume batch of imported pistachio cream product suspected to be contaminated with aflatoxin

The Centre for Food Safety (CFS) of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department today (December 17) urged the public not to consume a batch of prepackaged pistachio cream product imported from Germany due to possible contamination with aflatoxin. The trade should stop using or selling the affected batch of the product immediately if they possess it.

Product details are as follows:

Product name: Pistacchio Kerman Paste  
Brand: Cresco Italia  
Place of origin: Germany  
Net weight: Three kilograms  
Use-by date: December 31, 2025  
Batch number: 204759065-01  
Importer: JJ Global Sourcing Limited

A spokesman for the CFS said, "The CFS received a notification from the Rapid Alert System for Food and Feed of the European Commission, the above-mentioned product is being recalled as it contained aflatoxin B1 exceeding the EU's standard. Upon learning of the incident, the CFS immediately contacted local importers for follow-up and a preliminary investigation found that the above-mentioned importer had imported into Hong Kong the affected batch of the product. The aflatoxin level of the product also exceeded the local legal standard."

The importer has stopped selling and removed from shelves the affected batch of the product upon the CFS's instructions and has initiated a recall. Members of the public may call the hotline of the importer concerned at 2190 2125 during office hours for enquiries about the recall.

The World Health Organization (WHO)'s International Agency for Research on Cancer classified naturally occurring aflatoxins as carcinogenic to humans, and the Joint Food and Agriculture Organization/WHO Expert Committee on Food Additives advised that intake of aflatoxins should be reduced to levels as low as reasonably possible although no health-based guidance value has been set. Aflatoxins can lead to liver cancer after long-term ingestion, and the risk for hepatitis B carriers is relatively high.

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

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# Welcome home reception for HKSAR Delegation to 12th National Traditional Games of Ethnic Minorities of People's Republic of China held today (with photos)

The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) Government hosted a welcome home reception at the Tsuen Wan Sports Centre this afternoon (December 17) for the HKSAR Delegation to the 12th National Traditional Games of Ethnic Minorities of the People's Republic of China (NTGEM) returning from the Games. The Secretary for Culture, Sports and Tourism and the Head of the Delegation, Miss Rosanna Law, officiated at the ceremony and presented certificates of commendation to the athletes with outstanding performances as well as expressing gratitude to the coaches and support teams for their dedication.

Jointly organised by the National Ethnic Affairs Commission of the People's Republic of China and the General Administration of Sport of China, and hosted by the People's Government of Hainan Province, the 12th NTGEM was held from November 22 to 30 this year in Sanya, Hainan. The NTGEM, held every four years, is positioned as a mass participation sporting event and participants are mainly amateur athletes. To encourage active participation from different regions and ethnic groups, the competitions award first, second and third prizes instead of gold, silver and bronze medals.

The HKSAR took part in the Games for the first time. A total of 66 athletes participated in three competition events, namely shuttlecock, dragon boat and folk martial arts, as well as the demonstration event of dragon dance sport. Twenty athletes gave a lion dance performance at the opening ceremony. The athletes achieved remarkable results and were awarded in all four events with one second prize and four third prizes in total. The HKSAR Delegation also won the Sportsmanship Award. Apart from participating in the competition and demonstration events, the Delegation also joined the cultural exchange activities arranged by the Organising Committee to engage with athletes of other ethnic groups in developing a deeper understanding of the excellent traditional Chinese culture while consolidating a strong sense of community for the Chinese nation.

Attendance at the reception today included the Permanent Secretary for Culture, Sports and Tourism, Ms Vivian Sum; the Director of Leisure and Cultural Services and the Deputy Head of the Delegation, Ms Manda Chan; the Commissioner for Sports and Member of the Organising Committee of the Delegation, Mr George Tsoi; the President of the Sports Federation & Olympic

Committee of Hong Kong, China and the Chairman of the Organising Committee of the Delegation, Mr Timothy Fok; and the Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Delegation, Professor Patrick Yung.



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## CHP investigates two food poisoning clusters

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health is today (December 17) investigating two epidemiologically linked food poisoning clusters affecting eight persons, and reminded the public to maintain personal, food and environmental hygiene to prevent foodborne diseases.

The first cluster involved five females aged between 27 and 40, who developed abdominal pain, diarrhoea, nausea and vomiting about 19.5 to 37.5 hours after having a buffet dinner at Promenade Restaurant at Harbour Plaza Metropolis located in Hung Hom on December 10.

The second cluster involved three females aged between 26 and 47, who developed abdominal pain and diarrhoea about 10 to 18 hours after having a buffet dinner at the same restaurant on December 11.

Four of the affected persons sought medical advice. None required hospitalisation.

Initial investigations by the CHP revealed that the affected persons had

consumed common food including raw oysters. The incident might have been caused by norovirus or *Vibrio parahaemolyticus*.

Personnel from the Centre for Food Safety (CFS) of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department have conducted an inspection at the restaurant, took food samples for laboratory testing, and instructed the premises concerned to suspend serving incriminated food items with immediate effect and carry out cleaning and disinfection of the premises. The officers have also provided health education related to food safety and environmental hygiene to the staff of the premises.

The CHP and CFS's investigation is ongoing, and it cannot be ruled out that the number of cases will increase.

Norovirus infection typically causes acute gastroenteritis. It is also a common cause of food poisoning and is very often related to consumption of undercooked or raw shellfish. These diseases affect people of all age groups and tend to be more common during winter. *Vibrio parahaemolyticus* is commonly found in coastal waters where people are infected by eating raw or undercooked seafood.

To prevent foodborne diseases, members of the public are reminded to maintain personal, food and environmental hygiene at all times. When dining out, one should:

- Avoid eating raw seafood;
  - Be a discerning consumer in choosing cold dishes, including sashimi, sushi and raw oysters at a buffet;
  - Choose pasteurised eggs, egg products or dried egg powder for dishes that often use lightly cooked or uncooked eggs;
  - Patronise only reliable and licensed restaurants;
  - Store and reheat pre-cooked or leftover foods properly before consumption;
  - Ensure food is thoroughly cooked before eating during a hotpot or barbecue meal;
  - Handle raw and cooked foods carefully and separate them completely during the cooking process;
  - Use two sets of chopsticks and utensils to handle raw and cooked foods;
  - Avoid patronising illegal food hawkers;
  - Drink boiled water;
  - Refrain from trying to use salt, vinegar, wine or wasabi to kill bacteria as they are not effective; and
  - Always wash hands before eating and after going to the toilet.
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# Chief Executive in Council considers fare increase applications from franchised bus operators

The Chief Executive in Council (CE in C) today (December 17) considered the fare increase applications from franchised bus operators, and decided that:

- (a) fares of the Kowloon Motor Bus Company (1933) Limited (KMB) should be increased by an overall actual weighted average rate of 4.3 per cent after a 0.9 percentage points (ppts) mitigation effect by its Franchised Bus Toll Exemption Fund (TEF) (i.e. 5.2 per cent before mitigation);
- (b) fares of Citybus Limited (Franchise for the Urban and New Territories bus network) (CTB(U&NT)) should be increased by an overall weighted average rate of 7.5 per cent;
- (c) fares of New Lantao Bus Company (1973) Limited (NLB) should be increased by an overall weighted average rate of 6.5 per cent; and
- (d) the fare increases in (a) to (c) above should be implemented on January 5, 2025.

The fare increase applications and the decision of the CE in C are summarised in the table at the Annex. A Government spokesman said that the Government has duly exercised its gatekeeping role by exerting considerable efforts to carefully and rigorously scrutinise the fare increase applications from franchised bus operators. The decision of the CE in C endeavoured to minimise impacts on livelihood on one hand, and on the other also take into account the financial sustainability of franchised bus operators, with a view to enabling the franchised bus operators to continue to provide reliable and safe services to citizens. Upon the implementation of the new fares on January 5, 2025, about four-fifths of passengers are expected to pay no more than \$0.5 extra per trip and about 95 per cent of passengers are expected to pay no more than \$1 extra per trip.

During the approval process, the Government has examined the operating situation of the franchised bus industry, forecast financial performance, indices relevant to public affordability, as well as quality and quantity of their bus services. The Government has also exempted franchised bus operators from paying tolls when using government tolled tunnels and control areas since February 2019. The Tunnel Exemption Funds set up with the tolls saved has continued to perform its function, and effectively reduced the rate of fare increase of KMB this time.

A Government spokesman said, "Although patronage and revenue of franchised buses have bounced back noticeably after the epidemic, they are unable to fully recover to the pre-epidemic level due to reasons such as changes in travelling and consumption patterns. Further, franchised bus operators need to maintain reasonable remuneration packages to attract a high-quality workforce, as well as make investments in transition to a new

energy bus fleet. The Government has been assisting franchised bus operators in making substantial efforts to improve operational sustainability over the past few years, including broadening sources of non-farebox revenue, and enhancing operational efficiency through rationalisation of bus routes having regard to latest patterns of passenger demand. After careful consideration of the overall situation, the Government is satisfied that suitable adjustments to fares are necessary to help the franchised bus operators to maintain reasonable financial capability to continue to operate and invest."

The spokesman continued, "There had been few increases in franchised bus fares for a period in the past. Over the longer horizon, the cumulative rates of fare increases are still noticeably lower than changes in the Composite Consumer Price Index (CCPI) and other indices within the corresponding period. Taking the figures since mid-2008 as an example, after including the fare increases approved this time, the cumulative fare increases of the three franchises over the some 16 years averaged 1.6 per cent to 2.2 per cent on a yearly basis, while the cumulative change in the CCPI averaged 3 per cent on a yearly basis and the cumulative change in Median Monthly Household Income averaged 4.2 per cent on a yearly basis."

In arriving at the actual fare increase rates of individual routes, the Government has looked into the service nature and existing fare levels of these routes and made appropriate adjustments to effect relatively lower rates of increases on routes for daily commuters to minimise the impact of fare increases on the public. To mitigate the pressure for fare increases, the Government will continue to assist and guide franchised bus operators to raise revenue and reduce expenditure through a multipronged approach, including further expanding sources of non-farebox revenue, introducing tourist services routes with premium features to grasp opportunities presented by the multiple-entry Individual Visit Scheme, as well as enhancing the operational efficiency of bus networks through improving and rationalising bus routes having regard to latest situation of passenger demand.

The Government has been implementing the Public Transport Fare Subsidy Scheme (PTFSS) to relieve the fare burden of passengers who travel on local public transport services for daily commuting and whose public transport expenses are relatively high; whereas the Government Public Transport Fare Concession Scheme for the Elderly and Eligible Persons with Disabilities (i.e. the \$2 Scheme) would also benefit elderly passengers and eligible persons with disabilities. The Government is reviewing the mode of operation of the two schemes with the aim to enable continued provision of the schemes in a financially sustainable manner.

According to the Fare Adjustment Arrangement for Franchised Buses agreed by the CE in C, the Government has taken into account a basket of factors in assessing the bus fare adjustments:

- (a) changes in operating costs and revenue since the last fare adjustment;
- (b) forecasts of future costs, revenue and return;
- (c) the need to provide the franchisee with a reasonable rate of return;
- (d) public acceptability and affordability;

(e) the quality and quantity of service provided; and  
(f) the outcome of the supportable fare adjustment rate formula. The formula is only for reference and will not operate as an automatic determinant of the rate of fare adjustment.

In considering the fare increase applications of the franchised bus operators, the CE in C has, based on the above-mentioned arrangements, examined the cases holistically and fully considered the views of the Panel on Transport of the Legislative Council and the Transport Advisory Committee.

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## **Import of poultry eggs from areas in India suspended**

The Centre for Food Safety (CFS) of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department announced today (December 17) that in view of a notification from the World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH) about outbreaks of highly pathogenic H5N1 avian influenza in the Kendrapara District of Odisha State and the Pathanamthitta District of Kerala State in India, the CFS has instructed the trade to suspend the import of poultry eggs from the area with immediate effect to protect public health in Hong Kong.

A CFS spokesman said that Hong Kong has currently established a protocol with India for the import of poultry eggs but not for poultry meat. According to the Census and Statistics Department, no eggs were imported into Hong Kong from India in the first nine months of this year.

"The CFS has contacted the Indian authority over the issue and will closely monitor information issued by the WOAH and the relevant authorities on the avian influenza outbreaks. Appropriate action will be taken in response to the development of the situation," the spokesman said.