

CHP investigates two suspected food poisoning clusters

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health is today (December 30) investigating two suspected food poisoning clusters affecting nine persons, and reminded the public to maintain personal, food and environmental hygiene to prevent foodborne diseases.

The first cluster involved four females, aged between 25 and 38, who developed abdominal pain and diarrhoea about 9 to 12 hours after consuming food provided by a caterer on December 21.

The other cluster involved two males and three females, aged between two and 71, who developed similar symptoms about 9 to 18 hours after consuming the food ordered from the same caterer on December 25.

All of the affected persons have not sought medical advice. All affected persons are in stable condition.

Initial investigations of the CHP revealed that the affected persons had consumed common food and the food concerned were diced beef and beef ribs in red wine sauce. The incident might have been caused by *Clostridium perfringens*.

The personnel from the Centre for Food Safety of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department have conducted an inspection at the caterer's premises. The CHP's investigation is ongoing.

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

- Patronise only reliable and licensed restaurants;
- Avoid eating raw seafood;
- Be a discerning consumer in choosing cold dishes, including sashimi, sushi and raw oysters, at a buffet;
- Pre-cooked or leftover foods should be stored and reheated 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;
- Do not patronise illegal food hawkers;
- Drink boiled water;
- Do not try 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.

Local pig samples test positive for ASF virus

The Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) today (December 30) announced that samples taken from a pig farm in Yuen Long had tested positive for the African Swine Fever (ASF) virus.

An AFCD spokesman said, "Samples were taken from 10 pigs at a licensed pig farm in San Tin, Yuen Long yesterday (December 29). Upon testing by AFCD staff, all samples were found positive for the ASF virus. The AFCD has immediately suspended transportation of any pigs from the farm concerned until further notice according to the contingency plan on ASF. The AFCD is arranging culling of all pigs, totalling over 900 on the farm concerned for the sake of prudence."

He further said, "Positive cases should be seriously and promptly handled as the effect of ASF is very lethal to pigs. If the spread is not contained, a large number of pigs will die and hence seriously impacting pig farmers and the pig rearing industry. AFCD staff immediately notified all local pig farmers of this incident and reminded them to alert the AFCD immediately if abnormal health condition is observed in pigs. In addition, the AFCD has arranged staff to inspect the eight pig farms within three kilometres of the index farm and collect pig samples for ASF testing. For the sake of prudence, the AFCD has been suspending movements of pigs on those eight pig farms until further notice. No reports of abnormalities from pig farms outside the three-kilometre zone have been received so far. AFCD staff are conducting visits in phases to all local licensed pig farms to ensure biosecurity measures have been properly implemented; and continued close surveillance to detect pigs with abnormalities and if a farm is infected as early as possible. Besides, the AFCD is maintaining close contact with pig farmers via text message groups, keeping them informed of the latest situation of ASF and ways to prevent the infection of pigs."

The spokesman stressed that ASF is not a zoonotic disease and will not infect humans, hence does not cause any human health and food safety risk. Regardless of whether the pigs are infected with ASF, pork cooked thoroughly is safe for consumption. Members of the public do not need to be concerned. The AFCD held a seminar for pig farmers on specific preventive measures and biosecurity advice against ASF, with a view to enhancing vigilance of the industry in prevention of further spread of ASF. Meanwhile, in order to strengthen the knowledge of local pig farmers of the clinical signs of ASF for early detection and reporting of abnormality of pigs, the AFCD has launched the Guidelines for Reporting Cases of African Swine Fever to assist pig farmers in identifying suspected cases for early reporting and to take appropriate follow-up.

The present case does not affect the operation of local slaughterhouses nor the overall supply of live pigs. Since June 2019, a daily clearance arrangement whereby live pigs will be slaughtered within 24 hours upon admittance has been imposed in Sheung Shui and Tsuen Wan slaughterhouses. Under the arrangement, lairages in different areas of the slaughterhouses will be cleared out and undergo thorough cleaning and disinfection every day to further enhance the biosecurity and minimise the risk of infection among pigs in the slaughterhouses.

The Food and Environmental Hygiene Department and the AFCD will continue to stringently conduct cleaning and disinfection of Mainland live pig transportation vehicles and their counterparts for local pigs at slaughterhouses to minimise the risk of cross-infection of ASF. Mainland live pig vehicles and local ones should be thoroughly cleaned and disinfected every time they leave the Sheung Shui Slaughterhouse (SSSH), and the respective designated positions for their cleaning and disinfection are separated. Manpower and equipment of the SSSH have been strengthened immediately for cleaning and disinfection of the vehicles. In light of these stepped-up measures, the slaughterhouses need not be closed and other pigs need not be culled.

As culling operation takes time, the AFCD will release updated operation information every day later on the departmental web page, www.afcd.gov.hk, for the public.

Health risk category for Air Quality Health Index may reach "Serious" level

The Environmental Protection Department (EPD) has recorded higher than normal air pollution levels today (December 30). According to the EPD's forecast, it is expected that the Air Quality Health Index (AQHI) at some air quality monitoring stations may reach the "Very High" or "Serious" level later today.

Under the influence of a dry continental airstream, the weather in Hong Kong today is mainly fine. Light wind is unfavorable for pollutant dispersion. The intense sunshine enhances photochemical smog activity leading to rapid formation of ozone and fine particulates in the Pearl River Delta region.

According to the Hong Kong Observatory, a surge of northeast monsoon is expected to reach in the coming few days and then will be windy. The EPD expects air quality in Hong Kong will improve by then.

With a health risk category in the "Very High" range or above, children, the elderly and persons with existing heart or respiratory

illnesses are advised to reduce physical exertion and outdoor activities to a minimum or avoid such activities. The general public is advised to reduce, or reduce to a minimum, outdoor physical exertion, and to reduce time outdoors, especially in areas with heavy traffic. As health effects of air pollutants may vary for individuals, persons who are in doubt or experience discomfort should seek advice from healthcare professionals. The public may visit the Centre for Health Protection's website (www.chp.gov.hk/en/content/9/460/3557.html) for more information on health effects of air pollution and relevant health advice.

The Education Bureau (EDB) urges all schools to visit the EDB website for appropriate measures to safeguard students' health and take note of changes in the index. The relevant hyperlink is as follows: www.edb.gov.hk/en/sch-admin/admin/about-activities/sch-activities-guidelines/index.html.

When the AQHI is at the "Very High" level, employers of outdoor workers performing heavy manual work are advised to assess the risk of outdoor work and take appropriate preventive measures to protect the health of their employees, such as reducing outdoor physical exertion and the time of their stay outdoors, especially in areas with heavy traffic. At the "Serious" level, employers of all outdoor workers are advised to assess the risk of outdoor work and take appropriate preventive measures to protect the health of their employees.

Members of the public can check the current AQHI readings at the EPD's website (www.aqhi.gov.hk/en.html) or by calling the hotline 2827 8541.

[LCSD urges public to keep venues clean during New Year's Eve](#)

The Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD) today (December 30) appealed to members of the public to keep venues clean and mind their safety while celebrating New Year's Eve.

The LCSD will work with other government departments to implement a series of measures on New Year's Eve to maintain cleanliness and safety at LCSD venues including the Hong Kong Cultural Centre (HKCC) Piazza, Salisbury Garden, the Avenue of Stars, Tsim Sha Tsui Promenade, Middle Road Children's Playground, Tsim Sha Tsui East Waterfront Podium Garden, Urban Council Centenary, Kai Tak Sky Garden, Kwun Tong Promenade and Cha Kwo Ling Promenade along the Kowloon waterfront, as well as Tamar Park, the Central and Western District Promenade – Central Section, the Wan Chai Temporary Promenade and East Coast Park (Phase 1) on the waterfront of Hong Kong Island, where large crowds are expected to participate in countdown and celebration activities.

An LCSD spokesman said, "Our staff, together with law enforcement teams of relevant departments, will step up patrols and take action against littering, illegal hawking and vandalism of public property.

"People are urged to keep places clean and tidy while celebrating New Year's Eve. Defacing and damaging public property is prohibited at all venues. People should take away all their belongings when departing the venues and should not leave trash behind. Those who litter will be liable to a fine of \$3,000.

"In crowded areas, people should remain calm and be mindful of their own safety," he added. Publicity materials reminding members of the public to keep places clean will be displayed at the venues while additional cleaning staff and security guards will also be deployed.

The public announcement systems at the HKCC will also broadcast anti-littering and crowd management messages in Cantonese, Putonghua and English on a regular basis during the holiday. Crowd control measures will be implemented at the HKCC Piazza, Salisbury Garden, the Avenue of Stars and the Tsim Sha Tsui Promenade based on actual conditions. Members of the public are advised to pay attention to the announcements, follow the instructions of the duty personnel and mind their safety.

Phase 2 services of Trade Single Window fully implemented early

The Government announced today (December 30) that Phase 2 services of the Trade Single Window (TSW), covering a total of 28 types of trade documents, are fully implemented ahead of schedule to further facilitate the trade.

A Government spokesman said, "The TSW provides a one-stop electronic platform for the trade to lodge business-to-government trade documents for trade declaration and cargo clearance. Phase 2 services of the TSW have been rolled out in batches since May this year and have been operating smoothly. The services covering the last batch of trade documents are rolled out smoothly today, ahead of the original schedule, marking another significant milestone in the development of the TSW."

"Together with the 14 types of trade documents covered by Phase 1, TSW services have been expanded to cover a total of 42 types of trade documents (see Annex)."

In addition to significantly expanding the coverage, Phase 2 services of the TSW have also enhanced system functions to create better user experience.

These include advanced account management functions, full support for the "iAM Smart" Platform, seamless interface with the information systems of relevant government departments, provision of notification service and functions to allow submissions in bulk. Since May 2023, the TSW electronic platform has issued over 20 000 licenses/permits under Phase 2 services.

"The Government will continue to provide support and enhance publicity to encourage the trade to register as users on the TSW website (www.tradesinglewindow.hk) to enjoy the seamless e-services provided by the TSW in order to save time and cost. Implementation of the TSW will overhaul and enhance document submission workflows between relevant government departments and the trade, which will enhance the efficiency of cargo clearance in Hong Kong and consolidate Hong Kong's status as an international trade centre and logistics hub," the spokesman added.

The TSW is being implemented in three phases. Trade documents covered by the first two phases are mainly import and export licences/permits required for specific controlled goods, with the participation of the trade on a voluntary basis. The third and final phase of the TSW will involve a large number of document submitted by a wide range of stakeholders, covering Import and Export Declaration, Advance Cargo Information, Cargo Manifest and Cargo Report in respect of different transport modes, as well as applications for Certificate of Origin and Permit for Dutiable Commodities. The total volume of these documents was around 93 million in 2022. The Government aims to roll out Phase 3 services in batches from 2026 onwards.

The TSW project is taken forward by the Commerce and Economic Development Bureau, while the Office of Trade Single Window Operation of the Customs and Excise Department oversees the operation of the TSW system and provides support for users through training, help-desk and hotline services. For enquiries, please contact the Office of Trade Single Window Operation at 2117 3348 or by email to enquiry@tradesinglewindow.hk.