

Test results of targeted surveillance on coagulase-positive staphylococci organisms in ready-to-eat food all satisfactory

The Centre for Food Safety (CFS) of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department today (July 8) announced the results of a recently completed targeted food surveillance project on coagulase-positive staphylococci organisms (including *Staphylococcus aureus*) in ready-to-eat food. All samples passed the test.

A spokesman for the CFS said that a total of 300 ready-to-eat food samples were collected from different retail outlets (including online retailers) and food factories for testing of coagulase-positive staphylococci organisms this year. The samples included meat, poultry and their products (for example shredded chicken, siu mei and lo mei), salad, sashimi and sushi, dessert, Chinese cold dishes, sandwiches and steamed rice rolls.

The spokesman pointed out that *Staphylococcus aureus* is a common bacterium that can cause food poisoning. It exists widely in the environment and is commonly found in the nasal cavity, throat, hair and skin of healthy individuals. It is also present in large numbers in wounds and infected regions. If food handlers do not observe good personal hygiene, *Staphylococcus aureus* can pass to foods from them. Foods stored at ambient temperature for a prolonged period will allow the toxin-producing *Staphylococcus aureus* to multiply and form elaborate enterotoxins which can cause food poisoning. Although most cases of infection are caused by *Staphylococcus aureus*, other coagulase-positive staphylococci species can also produce enterotoxins which can lead to food poisoning.

Food poisoning caused by coagulase-positive staphylococci organisms is usually associated with foods that require considerable manual handling during preparation and no subsequent cooking is required before consumption. The poisoning risk cannot be eliminated by reheating as enterotoxins produced by coagulase-positive staphylococci organisms cannot be destroyed under normal cooking temperatures. Common symptoms of food poisoning caused by coagulase-positive staphylococci organisms include nausea, vomiting and abdominal pain, often accompanied by diarrhoea.

"Despite the fact that test results of the samples were all satisfactory, the trade and the public should not take the risk lightly. They should always maintain good personal, environmental and food hygiene to ensure food safety. To prevent food poisoning caused by coagulase-positive staphylococci organisms, members of the public are reminded to keep perishable foods or leftovers at or below 4 degrees Celsius or above 60 degrees C. The trade should adhere to the Good Manufacturing Practice that

cooked food should be cooled from 60 degrees C to 20 degrees C as quickly as possible (within two hours), and from 20 degrees C to 4 degrees C within four hours or less," the spokesman said.