

Three samples of tuna sashimi detected with mercury exceeding legal limit

The Centre for Food Safety (CFS) of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department announced today (March 28) that three samples of tuna sashimi were found to contain a metal contaminant, mercury, at levels exceeding the legal limit. The CFS is following up on the cases.

A spokesman for the CFS said, "Following up on cases referred by a relevant organisation, the CFS collected the above-mentioned samples from three restaurants in Tsuen Wan, Tsim Sha Tsui and Sha Tin for testing. The test results showed that they contained mercury at respective levels of 1.6 parts per million (ppm), 1 ppm and 0.79 ppm, exceeding the legal limit of 0.5 ppm."

The spokesman said the CFS has informed the restaurants concerned of the irregularities and they have stopped sale of the products concerned according to the CFS' instructions. Prosecution will be instituted should there be sufficient evidence. The CFS is also tracing the sources of the affected products.

"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, albacore, 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, pregnant women, women planning pregnancy and young children should avoid eating large or predatory fish," the spokesman said.

The CFS will continue to follow up on the cases and take appropriate action. Investigation is ongoing.