

Trade instructed to suspend importing and selling of raw oysters produced by Whitstable Oyster Company in UK

The Centre for Food Safety (CFS) of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department today (July 6) instructed the trade to suspend the import of raw oysters produced by Whitstable Oyster Company in the United Kingdom (UK). The trade should also stop using or selling the product concerned immediately should they possess it.

A spokesman for the CFS said, "The CFS was notified by the Centre for Health Protection of the Department of Health of several food poisoning cases which involved consumption of raw oysters at one restaurant in Sha Tin and one restaurant in Causeway Bay. The CFS conducted investigations at the restaurants concerned and found that both restaurants had sold raw oysters from the Whitstable Oyster Company in the United Kingdom supplied by the same local supplier. As well, the CFS received a notification from the Food Standards Agency of the UK that raw oysters supplied by Whitstable Oyster Company in the UK were suspected to be contaminated with norovirus. For the sake of prudence, the CFS has immediately instructed the trade to suspend the import into and sale within Hong Kong of all raw oysters produced by Whitstable Oyster Company in UK."

The CFS has also instructed the supplier and restaurants concerned to stop supplying and selling the affected raw oysters immediately, and is tracing the distribution of the affected product. The trade should also stop using or selling the product in question.

The spokesman pointed out that as oysters feed by filtering a large volume of seawater, pathogens (such as norovirus), chemical contaminants or natural toxins can accumulate in them if they are grown in or harvested from contaminated water. Regardless of the season or the region in which the oysters are harvested, consuming oysters, particularly raw or partially cooked ones, carries an inherent food safety risk. Susceptible groups, such as pregnant women, young children, the elderly and people with weakened immune systems or liver diseases, should avoid eating raw oysters.

The CFS will inform the British authorities and will also notify the local trade. It will continue to follow up on the incident and take appropriate action to safeguard food safety and public health. An investigation is ongoing.