

Two fish ball samples detected with methylmercury at levels that may have breached Food Adulteration (Metallic Contamination) Regulations

The Centre for Food Safety (CFS) of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department today (October 31) announced that two loose-packed fish ball samples were detected with methylmercury, a metallic contaminant, at levels which may have contravened the Food Adulteration (Metallic Contamination) Regulations. The CFS is following up on the incidents.

A spokesman for the CFS said, "The CFS collected the above-mentioned samples from two restaurants in Mong Kok and North Point for testing when following up on earlier relevant incidents. The test results showed that each sample contained methylmercury at a level of 0.2 part per million. Risk assessment of the CFS revealed that for groups vulnerable to methylmercury toxicity (such as pregnant women), consuming a high amount of fish balls with prolonged consumption of the concerned food may pose an adverse effect on health."

The spokesman said that the CFS had informed the restaurants concerned of the irregularities, and had instructed them to stop sales of the affected products. Prosecutions will be instituted should there be sufficient evidence.

"Methylmercury is the major form of mercury in fish. 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's Total Diet Study has also pointed out that large fish or predatory fish species may contain high mercury levels (for example, tuna, alfonso, shark, swordfish, marlin, orange roughy and king mackerel). Hence, groups particularly susceptible to the adverse effects of mercury, such as pregnant women, women planning a 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 to minimise excessive exposure to metal contaminants in food," the spokesman added.

According to the Food Adulteration (Metallic Contamination) Regulations (Cap. 132V), any person who sells food with metallic contamination in an amount that is dangerous or prejudicial to health is liable upon conviction to a fine of \$50,000 and imprisonment for six months.

The CFS will continue to follow up on the incidents and take appropriate action. Investigations are ongoing.