
Seasonal Food Surveillance — Lunar New Year Food

Centre for Food Safety

Food and Environmental Hygiene Department

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Background

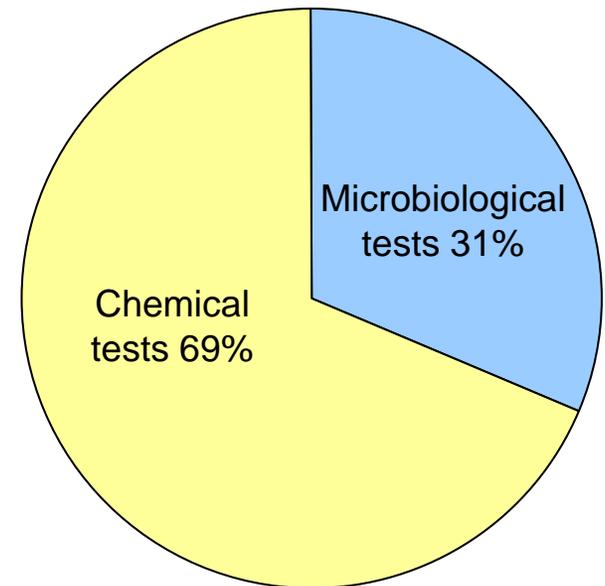
- Before Lunar New Year, people would buy festive food to celebrate the holiday.
- The Centre for Food Safety recently conducted a seasonal surveillance project on Lunar New Year Food :
 - to assess the safety of LNY food and
 - to provide information to consumers for informed choices.

Types of food tested

- 685 food samples were collected for testing.
- Types of food included:
 - steamed puddings (e.g., turnip pudding, festive cake)
 - fried dumplings (e.g., sesame balls, crispy triangles)
 - sweetened fruits & vegetables
 - glutinous rice balls
 - seeds
 - dried vegetables & dried soybean products
 - dried aquatic products
 - Chinese preserved meat
 - Poon Choi
 - others

Types of analysis

- Microbiological tests included
 - total bacterial counts, *Salmonella*, *Clostridium perfringens*, *Bacillus cereus*, *Staphylococcus aureus* and other food poisoning organisms
- Chemical tests included
 - preservatives (e.g., sulphur dioxide, benzoic acid and formaldehyde)
 - colouring matters (e.g., Sudan dyes)
 - antioxidants
 - metallic contamination (e.g., cadmium, mercury & arsenic)
 - toxins (e.g. aflatoxin)



Overall results

- There were 5 unsatisfactory samples. Overall satisfactory rate was 99.3%.

Sample	Unsatisfactory testing item	Result
1 Chinese preserved pork sausage	Red 2G (colouring matter)	Detected ⁽¹⁾
2 Bamboo fungus	Sulphur Dioxide (preservative)	4400 - 4800 ppm ⁽²⁾
1 Dried fish maw	Sulphur Dioxide (preservative)	270 ppm ⁽²⁾
1 Shanghai New Year pudding	Sulphur Dioxide (preservative) Benzoic acid (preservative)	48 ppm ⁽²⁾ 2700 ppm ⁽³⁾

(1) Not permitted in food.

(2) A commonly used preservative but the detected levels exceeded the legal limit. It is of low toxicity and should not pose adverse health effects on consumers. Since sulphur dioxide is water soluble, most of it can be removed through washing, soaking and cooking.

(3) A commonly used preservative but the detected levels exceeded the legal limit. It is of low toxicity and should not pose significant health effect on consumers.

Follow-up actions

- Trace source of food items in question
- Request vendors to stop sale and dispose of incriminated food items
- Issue warning letters to concerned vendors
- Take follow-up samples for analysis
- Take prosecution actions if there is sufficient evidence

Advices for trade

- Adhere to the "good manufacturing practice" (GMP) for manufacturing food products, and comply with the legal requirements when using food additives.
- Source materials from reliable suppliers. Conduct quality audit to incoming materials and end products to ensure that ingredients used do not contain any non-permitted colouring matters.

Advices for consumers

- Members of the public should purchase foods from reliable shops.
- For prepackaged foods, remember to check whether their packaging is intact and observe for the expiry date.
- Avoid choosing those Lunar New Year food which are of abnormally intensified colour.
- Raw and cooked foods should be stored separately to avoid cross contamination.
- Maintain a balanced diet and avoid eating too much Lunar New Year food with high energy, sugar, fat and/ or cholesterol.