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# Targeted food surveillance – Preservatives in preserved fruits and vegetables

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Centre for Food Safety

Food and Environmental Hygiene Department

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# Background

- Preservatives (e.g. sulphur dioxide, benzoic acid and sorbic acid) are commonly used in preserving fruits and vegetables.
- The Centre for Food Safety (CFS) notes that there had been levels of excessive preservatives detected in samples of preserved fruits and vegetables.
- In view of this, a targeted food surveillance project conducted by the CFS is continued in 2010 to assess the situation.

# Types of samples

- The CFS collected 450 samples for testing from October to December 2010.
- Types of samples
  - preserved vegetables (such as cucumber, radish, leaf mustard, rakkyo, ginger and chilies)
  - preserved fruits (such as dried mango, dried pineapple, raisin, apricots, plums, dried apple ring, sour peach and olives)
- Testing items
  - preservatives (including sulphur dioxide, benzoic acid, sorbic acid and parabens)

# Unsatisfactory samples

- There are 6 unsatisfactory food samples. The overall satisfactory rate was 98.7%.

Sample	Unsatisfactory testing item	Result
1 preserved vegetable (pickled sweet ginger)	Sulphur dioxide*	197 ppm
5 preserved fruits (including dried apple ring, sour peach, mango strip and 2 raisins)	Sulphur dioxide*	1570 – 3940 ppm
	Benzoic acid	1530 – 1700 ppm

The levels exceeded the legal limits. They are of low toxicity and will not cause adverse health effects upon normal consumption.

\* For individuals who are allergic to this preservative, there may be symptoms of breathing difficulty, headache and nausea.

# Follow up actions

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

# Advice for the trade

- Use of preservatives is regulated under the Preservatives in Food Regulation, Cap.132 BD. The maximum penalty for conviction is a fine of \$50,000 and imprisonment for 6 months.
- Adhere to the "good manufacturing practice" (GMP) and comply with the legal requirements when using preservatives.
- Source food and ingredients from reliable sources.

# Advice for consumers

- The preservatives concerned are commonly used in food processing and are of low toxicity. They should not pose significant health effect on consumers upon normal consumption.
- Buy food from reliable suppliers of food.
- Maintain a balanced diet to minimize risk.