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# Targeted Food Surveillance – Sulphur Dioxide in Meat

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Centre for Food Safety

Food and Environmental Hygiene Department

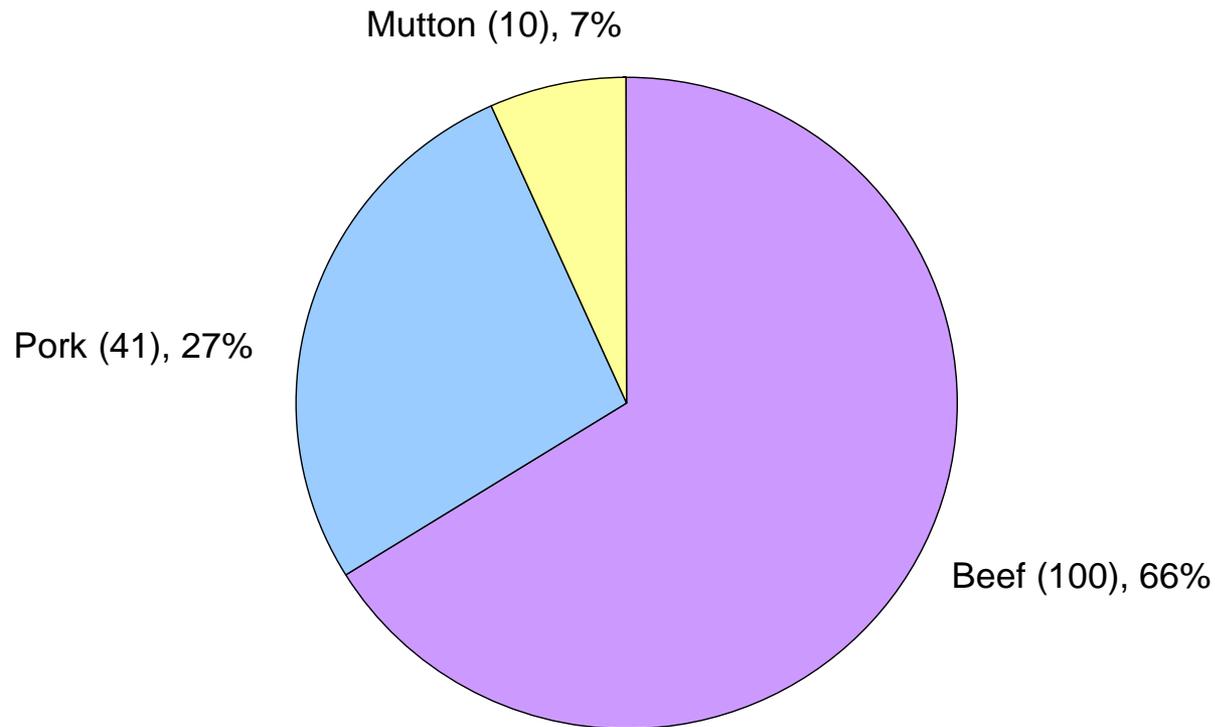
April 2010

# Background

- Sulphur dioxide is a commonly used preservative in a variety of foods including dried fruits, pickled vegetables and sausages. However, under the law, sulphur dioxide is not permitted in fresh, chilled or frozen meat.
- Given the perishable nature of meat, individual meat traders had been found to use sulphur dioxide against the law so as to make the colour of meat apparently fresher.
- The Centre for Food Safety (CFS) has repeatedly detected meat samples containing sulphur dioxide in recent years. The targeted food surveillance is continued this year to assess the use of sulphur dioxide in meat.

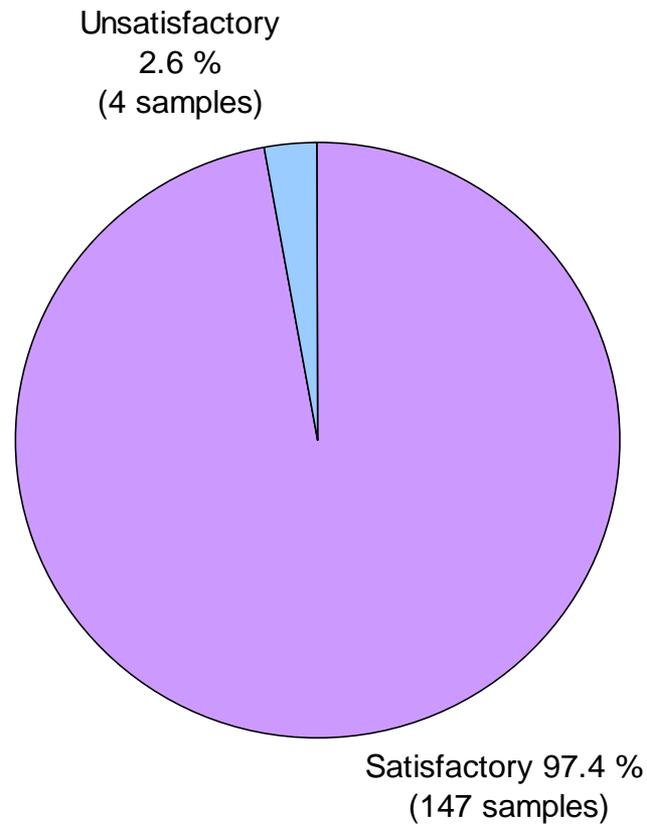
# Types of meat samples tested

- 151 samples were collected for testing of sulphur dioxide.
- The sampling locations have covered the meat stalls which have previous records of selling meat containing sulphur dioxide.



# Overall results

- Overall satisfactory rate was 97.4%.



# Unsatisfactory samples

- There were 4 fresh beef samples found to contain sulphur dioxide at levels between 110 and 3900 ppm.
- Totally 4 meat stalls were involved. All of them were new offenders.

# Follow up actions

- Issue warning letters.
- Carry out investigation and take follow up samples.
- CFS will closely monitor the situation.

# Advice for trade

- Comply with the law and should not use sulphur dioxide in fresh, chilled or frozen meat. Under the Preservatives in Food Regulations (Cap. 132, sub. leg.), selling fresh, chilled or frozen meat containing sulphur dioxide is an offence and the maximum penalty is a fine of \$50,000 and 6 months' imprisonment.
- The Food and Environmental Health Department will register demerit points against the fresh provision shop according to the “Demerit Points System” for licensed food premises. For repeated offenders, the penalty of suspension or cancellation of licence will be imposed.
- For public market stalls, tenancy may be terminated according to the current mechanism.

# Advice for consumers

- Sulphur dioxide is a food preservative of low toxicity. It is also water soluble and most of it tends to be removed through washing and cooking. Based on the detected levels, adverse health effects is unlikely upon normal consumption.
- For susceptible individuals who are allergic to sulphur dioxide, they may experience breathing difficulty, headaches and nausea.
- Purchase meat from reliable market stalls or fresh provision shops.
- Do not buy or consume meat which is unnaturally red.
- Take a balanced diet so as to avoid excessive exposure to food preservatives from a small range of food items.