
Seasonal Food Surveillance — Chinese New Year Food

Centre for Food Safety

Food and Environmental Hygiene Department

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Background

- Conducted in January & February 2007.
- Objectives:
 - To monitor the compliance with stipulated requirements and microbiological quality of CNY foods
 - To assess the safety situation of CNY food which is of public concern
 - To provide information to the trade for further improvement
 - To provide information to consumers for informed choices

Types of food tested

- About 600 food samples collected for testing
- Types of food included:
 - steamed puddings (e.g., turnip pudding)
 - fried dumplings (e.g., sesame balls, crispy triangles)
 - sweetened fruits & vegetables
 - glutinous rice balls
 - seeds
 - dried seafood & grocery
 - dried vegetables & dried soybean products
 - preserved meat
 - poon choi
 - tea leaves
 - others

Types of analysis

- Microbiological tests included
 - *Salmonella*, *Clostridium perfringens*, *Bacillus cereus*, *Staphylococcus aureus* and other food poisoning organisms, etc

- Chemical tests included
 - preservatives (e.g., sulphur dioxide, benzoic acid and formaldehyde)
 - colouring matters (e.g., Sudan dyes)
 - sweeteners
 - metallic contamination (e.g., cadmium, mercury & arsenic) and
 - pesticides, etc

Overall results

- Results were announced on 3 occasions in January & February 2007.
- Overall satisfactory rate was 97.7%.
- Samples tested for Sudan dyes were all satisfactory.
- All samples of tea leaves tested for pesticides residues were satisfactory.

The unsatisfactory samples

- Totally 14 unsatisfactory samples

Unsatisfactory samples	Fail test items	Results
1 Turnip pudding	Benzoic acid (preservative)	450 ppm ¹
4 dried daylily flowers	Sulphur dioxide (preservative)	3800 – 9500 ppm ²
2 bamboo fungus	Cadmium (heavy metal) Sulphur dioxide (preservative)	2.1 ppm ³ 3300 ppm ²
1 Poon Choi	Clostridium perfringens & Bacillus cereus (pathogens)	Detected ⁴
6 Chinese candies	Sulphur dioxide (preservative)	680 – 2800 ppm ⁵

¹A commonly used preservative of low toxicity but is not permitted to be used in turnip pudding.

²Most sulphur dioxide in dried vegetables will be removed by thorough soaking, washing & cooking.

³The level is low and should not pose significant health risk to consumers.

⁴Pathogens may cause gastrointestinal upset such as abdominal pain and diarrhoea.

⁵A commonly used preservative. The levels were low and should not pose significant health effect on consumers.

Summary

- The overall satisfactory rate was high at 97.7%.
- The unsatisfactory samples were mainly related to the use of excessive or non-permitted preservatives such as sulphur dioxide & benzoic acid.
- Except for the sample of poon choi with pathogens *Clostridium perfringens* and *Bacillus cereus*, none of the unsatisfactory samples posed significant health risk to consumers.

Advice for trade

- Use only permitted food additives, follow good manufacturing practice & comply with legal requirements.
- When preparing poon choi,
 - keep it at 60°C or above after production and during transportation; or chilled it at 4°C or below to prevent microbiological growth,
 - cook all ingredients thoroughly,
 - cover foods properly and keep raw and cooked foods at different levels in the refrigerator (keep cooked food above the raw ones) to prevent cross contamination,
 - maintain good personal hygiene practices.

Advice for consumers

- Most sulphur dioxide can be removed by thoroughly soaking, washing and cooking of food.
- Order poon choi from reliable and licensed food supplier and make sure it is reheated thoroughly before consumption.
- Maintain a balanced diet and avoid eating too much Chinese New Year food with high energy, sugar, fat and/or cholesterol.