

Annual Summary of 2009 Food Surveillance Programme

Centre for Food Safety

Food and Environmental Hygiene Department

2009 Food Surveillance Programme

- Inspectors of the CFS take samples of food items at the import, wholesale and retail levels for microbiological and chemical testing for assessing their risk.
- The Food Surveillance Programme covers the following three main areas:
 - Routine Food Surveillance
 - Targeted Food Surveillance
 - Seasonal Food Surveillance
- In addition, the CFS also conducts surveys on popular local food items.

Routine Food Surveillance

- Routine food surveillance covers major food groups such as fruits and vegetables, meat, poultry, aquatic products, milk and cereals.
- The types of testing extensively cover:
 - microbiological testing such as pathogens and hygiene indicators
 - chemical testing such as pesticides, veterinary drug residues, preservatives, colouring matters, metallic contaminants and biotoxins
- The CFS releases surveillance results to the public and the trade regularly in the form of Food Safety Reports. Apart from announcing surveillance results, the CFS also gives advice to the public to minimise health risks posed by problem foods.

Targeted food surveillance

- Taking into consideration factors such as past food surveillance data, the non-compliant situations, food incidents happened in various parts of the world and the risks of different types of food, the CFS has undertaken a number of targeted food surveillance projects and published the relevant reports:
 - ❑ Sudan Dyes in Eggs and Egg Products
 - ❑ Microbiological Quality of Ice-cream and Frozen Confections
 - ❑ Microbiological Quality of Lunch Boxes
 - ❑ Microbiological Quality of Prepackaged Food That Required Reheating Before Consumption
 - ❑ Microbiological Quality of Bottled Water
 - ❑ Sulphur Dioxide in Meat
 - ❑ Nitrate and nitrite in meat, meat products and cheese
 - ❑ Formaldehyde in Noodlefish
 - ❑ Enterobacter Sakazakii in Powdered Infant Formula
 - ❑ Preservatives in Preserved Fruits and Vegetables

Seasonal food surveillance

- In 2009, the CFS continued to monitor and assess the safety of highly popular festive and seasonal food items.
- The CFS announced the results before each season and festival. The completed projects included:
 - Chinese New Year Food
 - Rice Dumplings
 - Mooncakes
 - Hairy Crabs
 - Poon Choi

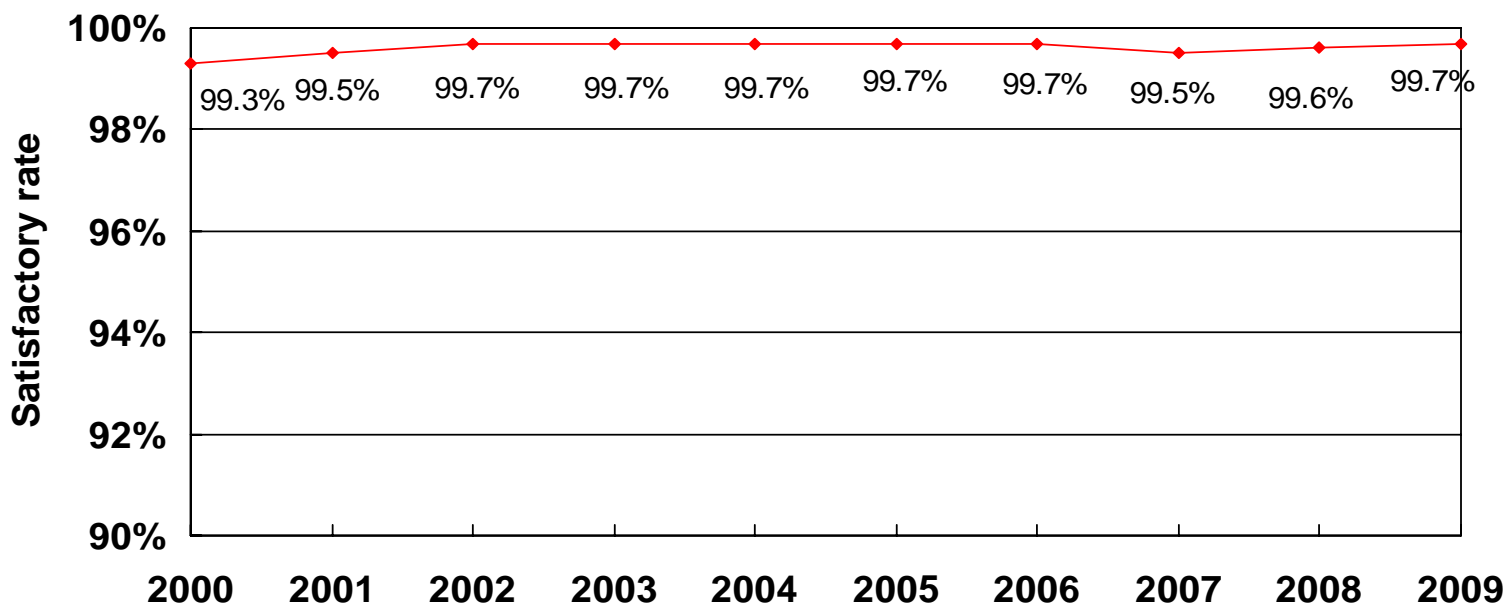
Survey on popular food

- The CFS also conducted surveys on popular food items to assess the safety of commonly consumed food items which include:
 - ❑ Cart Noodles
 - ❑ Hong Kong Style Desserts
 - ❑ Traditional Local Snacks

Overall results

- The overall satisfactory rate was 99.7%, which was comparable to those of recent years.

**Overall satisfactory rates of food surveillance programme
(2000 - 2009)**



Overall results (Cont'd)

- Total 215 unsatisfactory samples. The results of different types of food are as follows.

Food group	No. of samples*	Unsatisfactory samples	Satisfactory rate
Vegetables, fruits & products	25800	38	99.9%
Meat, poultry & products	7800	76	99.0%
Aquatic products	5700	30	99.5%
Milk, milk products & frozen confections	8900	34	99.6%
Cereal, grains and products	1300	4	99.7%
Others	13400	33	99.8%
Total	62900	215	99.7%

* N.B.: Figures are rounded.

Overall results (Cont'd)

- Major problems of the unsatisfactory samples are as follows:
 - (1) Sulphur Dioxide (a Preservative) in Meat
 - (2) Hygienic Quality of Ice-cream and Frozen Confections
 - (3) Hygiene Indicators for Imported Frozen Confections
 - (4) Metallic Contaminants in Seafood

Overall results (Cont'd)

(1) Sulphur Dioxide (a Preservative) in Meat

- The Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) stepped up control over the use of sulphur dioxide in meat. The FEHD collected more than 1000 meat samples, including beef, pork and mutton, from fresh provision shops and market meat stalls for testing.
- Of these samples, 63 were found to contain sulphur dioxide.
- Warning letters were immediately issued to the traders concerned and follow-up samples were taken to monitor their improvements.
- Prosecutions were taken against the traders when there was sufficient evidence. As of the end of December 2009, 53 cases had been successfully prosecuted.

Overall results (Cont'd)

(2) Hygienic Quality of Ice-cream and Frozen Confections

- The CFS conducted a targeted food surveillance project where about 1000 samples of ice-cream and frozen confections were collected for microbiological tests.
- All samples were found satisfactory for the test of pathogens, yet 11 samples were found with hygiene indicators (total bacterial count and coliform organisms) exceeding the respective legal standards.
- Such results were believed to have been caused by sub-optimal hygienic conditions in the course of processing at the food premises concerned.
- The FEHD had taken immediate follow-up actions, such as
 - ❑ conducting inspections on the hygienic conditions of food premises
 - ❑ requiring the traders to strictly observe good hygienic practices
 - ❑ issuing warning letters
 - ❑ collecting follow-up samples to monitor their improvements. All 9 follow-up samples were found satisfactory upon further testing.

Overall results (Cont'd)

(3) Hygiene Indicators for Imported Frozen Confections

- Samples of imported frozen confections are taken for testing at the import level. In particular, frozen confections imported into Hong Kong for the first time should be detained and found to have satisfactory testing results before entering the market for sale.
- In 2009, the CFS found that the hygiene indicators (total bacterial count and coliform organisms) of 20 samples from four consignments of imported frozen confections exceeded legal standards.
- All these consignments were either sealed and disposed of or returned to the countries of origin, without entering the retail market.
- Warning letters were immediately issued to the relevant importers and the authorities of the exporting countries were also notified for follow-up.
- The products in question have been banned from import into Hong Kong temporarily until the CFS receives satisfactory investigation results.

Overall results (Cont'd)

(4) Metallic Contaminants in Seafood

- In conducting routine food surveillance in 2009, the CFS from time to time found that seafood samples contained levels of metallic contaminants exceeding the legal limits. For instance,
 - mercury was detected in large predatory fish (such as swordfish, tuna), and
 - cadmium was found in bivalve shellfish (such as oyster, scallop) and crustaceans (such as scampi, crab meat)
- The possibility cannot be ruled out that long term exposure to metallic contaminants exceeding safety levels may cause damage to organs, particularly among vulnerable groups such as foetuses and young children.

Overall results (Cont'd)

(4) Metallic Contaminants in Seafood (Cont'd)

- As metallic contaminants in food come from a wide range of sources, it is more effective to control contamination at source.
- The CFS will trace the sources of the unsatisfactory samples and notify the authorities of the places of origin for follow-up.
- The CFS will also issue warning letters to the traders concerned requiring them to stop selling and dispose of the food in question.
- The public are advised to maintain a balanced diet and eat a variety of seafood so as to reduce food risks.

Conclusion

- The Food Surveillance Programme of 2009 reveals that the overall satisfactory rate of food products in Hong Kong was maintained at a high level, which was comparable to the results of recent years.
- For individual problem food items identified, the CFS has taken prompt and effective risk management actions to safeguard public health.
- The CFS has also released food surveillance results and given relevant advice to the public and the trade in a timely manner, and promoted the tripartite collaboration among the Government, the food trade and members of the public in ensuring food safety in Hong Kong.