

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, lots of people like to buy festive food to celebrate the festival. At the same time, they would be concerned about the food safety.
- 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.



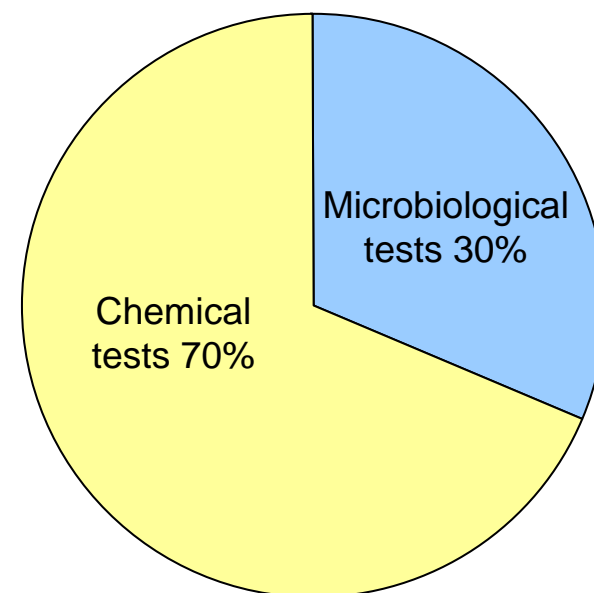
Types of food tested

- 684 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 3 unsatisfactory samples. Overall satisfactory rate was 99.6%.

Sample	Unsatisfactory testing item	Result
2 Bamboo fungus	Sulphur dioxide (preservative)	1200 and 2200 ppm ⁽¹⁾
1 Sweetened winter melon	Sulphur dioxide (preservative)	643ppm ⁽¹⁾

- (1) 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.
- 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
- Issue warning letters to concerned vendors
- Take follow-up samples for analysis
- Take prosecution actions if there is sufficient evidence

Advices for the 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 are within legal standards.

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.
- 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.