

Survey on Popular Food Items: Cart noodles

Centre for Food Safety

Food and Environmental Hygiene Department

April 2009

Background



- Cart noodles are a kind of local food characteristic to Hong Kong. They consist of various kinds of noodle, pre-cooked ingredients and sauce displaying in a counter and to be selected by customers for making up the desired combination of items.
- Because of the attractive choices and fair prices, they are provided by different types of food premises to many people all time of the day. Therefore, the safety of these foods is all along an issue of concern.
- The Centre for Food Safety (CFS) recently conducted a project on cart noodles as the latest theme of “Survey on Popular Food Items” to assess their safety.
- Tests include microbiological testing and chemical analysis.

Testing items



Microbiological testing

- Include pathogens such as *Bacillus cereus*, *Salmonella*, *Staphylococcus aureus*, *Vibrio parahaemolyticus*, *Clostridium perfringens* and *Escherichia coli* O157 in ingredients and mixed dishes.
- Selling of cart noodles may be associated with some conditions:
 - ❑ Storage of raw and cooked food in the small sized food premises can easily cause cross contamination
 - ❑ Large serving volume by using simple cooking utensils may lead to inadequate cooking of food
 - ❑ The usually hot production environment allows rapid bacterial growth

Testing items (cont'd)

Chemical analysis

- Ingredients of cart noodle may include processed fresh raw materials. Hence, colouring matters, mineral oil, preservatives and antioxidants may be applied to them to make them
 - more colourful and attractive, e.g. pork sausage, lo shiu and curry ingredients;
 - fresher, e.g. noodles; and
 - less perishable.
- Therefore, they are the major testing parameters in this project.



Testing items (cont'd)

Chemical analysis (cont'd)

- CFS also collected
 - vegetable samples for testing of pesticide residues.
 - Samples of vegetable, noodles and aquatic products for testing of heavy metals
 - Samples of aquatic products for testing of malachite green.

Types of food tested

- 292 samples of various ingredients and mixed dishes of cart noodles were collected from 133 retail outlets including cooked food stalls, food factories and restaurants in different districts for testing.

Type of food item	No. of samples	Percentage
Meat, poultry and products	78	26.7%
Aquatic products	69	23.6%
Cereal and products	58	19.9%
Vegetables, legumes and products	25	8.6%
Soup base and sauces	26	8.9%
Dumplings	12	4.1%
Mixed dishes	24	8.2%
Total	292	100%

Meat, poultry and products

- Samples include pig skin, pig large intestine, pig blood, pork ball, pork sausage, sausage, cheese sausage, beef flank, cattle tripe, cattle offal, cattle tendon, beef ball, Lo Shui chicken wing and chicken claw.



Aquatic products

- Samples include fried fish slice/ ball, fish ball, fried fish skin, curry fish ball, curry squid, cuttlefish ball, octopus, shrimp ball and shrimp cake.



Cereal and products

- Samples include thick noodles, thin noodles, Yau Mian (noodles), e-fu noodles, Lai Fan (noodles), flat noodles, rice noodles, rice vermicelli, fried tofu and vegetarian food (soybean product).



Vegetables, legumes and products

- Samples include lettuce, Chinese chives, Chinese white cabbage, water spinach, radish, winter mushroom, preserved cabbage and soybean sheet.



Soup base and sauces

- Samples include beef flank sauce, curry sauce and satay sauce.



Dumplings

- Samples include wanton, fish skin dumpling and dumpling.



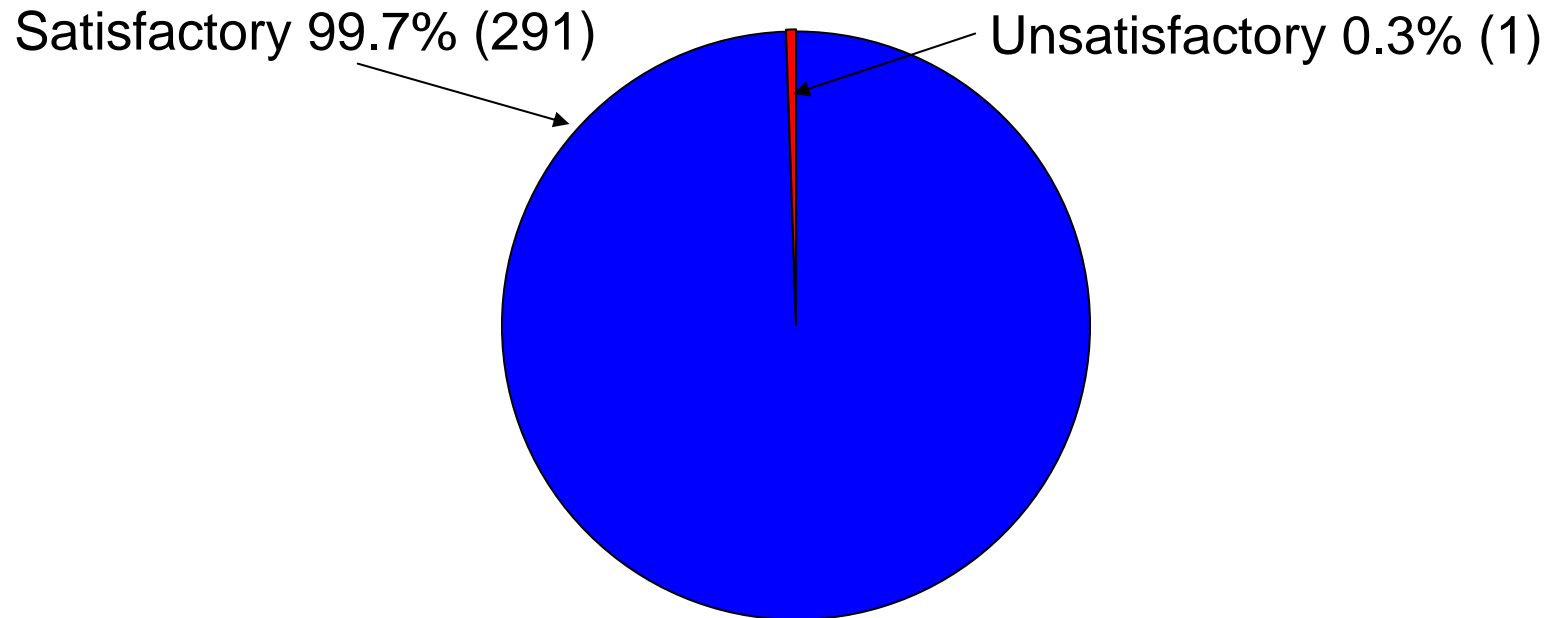
Mixed dishes

- Samples include cart noodles of various noodles and ingredients.



Overall results

- 1 sample was unsatisfactory.
- Overall satisfactory rate was 99.7%.



Unsatisfactory samples

- 1 unsatisfactory sample:

Sample	Unsatisfactory testing item	Result
1 cattle offal	<i>Salmonella spp.</i>	detected ⁽¹⁾

⁽¹⁾ *Salmonella* can cause diarrhoea, fever and vomiting. In otherwise healthy people, the symptoms should go away in 2-5 days.

Follow-up actions

- Issue warning letters to concerned vendors.
- Take follow-up samples.
- Take prosecution actions if there is sufficient evidence.

Advice for trade

- The unsatisfactory sample involved the contamination with enteric pathogen in food. The trade should always comply with hygienic practices:

- ❑ maintain good personal hygiene
- ❑ wash raw materials thoroughly
- ❑ cook food thoroughly
- ❑ separate raw food from ready-to-eat food to prevent cross contamination
- ❑ always cover food properly (including those for display) and keep food at safe temperatures (4°C or below; above 60 °C)



Advice for consumers

- Do not purchase from unlicensed hawker. Buy food only from licensed and reliable food premises.
- Note the storage conditions of food. Do not purchase food which have been improperly stored, e.g., those were not covered well or kept under ambient temperature for prolonged period.
- Do not eat food which is undercooked, inadequately reheated or of abnormal colour and taste.
- Maintain a balanced diet to minimize risk.

