

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 (LNY), people would buy festive food to celebrate the holiday. At the same time, they would be concerned about the safety of the festive food.
- As such, 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

- 633 food samples collected for testing.
- Types of food included:
 - steamed puddings (e.g. turnip pudding, festive cake)
 - poon choi
 - fried dumplings (e.g. sesame balls, crispy triangles)
 - Chinese sweetened fruits & vegetables
 - glutinous rice balls
 - seeds
 - dried vegetables & dried soybean products
 - dried aquatic products
 - Chinese preserved meat
 - others

Types of analysis

■ Microbiological examinations 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)
- ❑ sweeteners
- ❑ metallic contamination (e.g. cadmium, mercury & arsenic)
- ❑ pesticides
- ❑ toxins (e.g. aflatoxin)
- ❑ others

Overall results

- Overall satisfactory rate was 99%
- All bacteriological test results satisfactory
- All samples satisfactory for sweeteners, metallic contamination, pesticides and toxins
- In total 6 samples were unsatisfactory in respect of preservatives and colouring matters

The unsatisfactory samples

■ 6 unsatisfactory samples

Samples	Tests	Results
2 sweetened winter-melon (糖冬瓜)	Sulphur dioxide (preservative)	2800 - 4700 ppm ⁽¹⁾
1 bamboo fungus (竹筍)	Sulphur dioxide (preservative)	4900 ppm ⁽¹⁾
1 dried daylily flower (金針)	Sulphur dioxide (preservative)	3100 ppm ⁽¹⁾
1 Chinese pork sausage (臘腸)	Red 2G (colouring matter)	Detected ⁽²⁾
1 red melon seeds (紅瓜子)	Red 2G (colouring matter)	Detected ⁽²⁾

⁽¹⁾ Sulphur dioxide is a commonly used preservative but the levels detected have exceeded the legal limit in that kind of food.

⁽²⁾ Under the law, Red 2G is not a permitted colouring matter.

Follow up actions

- Issue warning letters.
- Ask concerned retailers to stop selling and to dispose of those food items.
- Take prosecution actions if there is sufficient evidence.

Advice for 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 do not contain any non-permitted colouring matters.

Advice for consumers

- Members of the public should purchase foods from reliable shops. Purchase pre-packaged foods first and live poultry, meat and seafood last.
- For prepackaged foods, remember to check whether their packaging is intact and look at the expiry date.
- Avoid choosing those Lunar New Year food which are of abnormally intensified colour.
- 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.