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# Targeted Food Surveillance on *Listeria Monocytogenes* in Ready-to-eat Food kept under Refrigeration

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# Background

- The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) recorded an increasing number of listeriosis in past 2 years. In the period spanning 2010 to 2012, CHP recorded 6, 13 and 26 cases of listeriosis respectively.
- Most healthy people infected with listeriosis are asymptomatic or only suffered from mild illness (e.g. fever, muscle aches and gastrointestinal symptoms). However, the effect on high risk individuals like pregnant women, newborns, the elderly and people with compromised immunity can be severe. The infection can result in septicaemia, meningitis, encephalitis, miscarriage, stillbirth or premature birth in severe cases.
- Listeriosis is usually caused by eating food contaminated with *Listeria monocytogenes*.

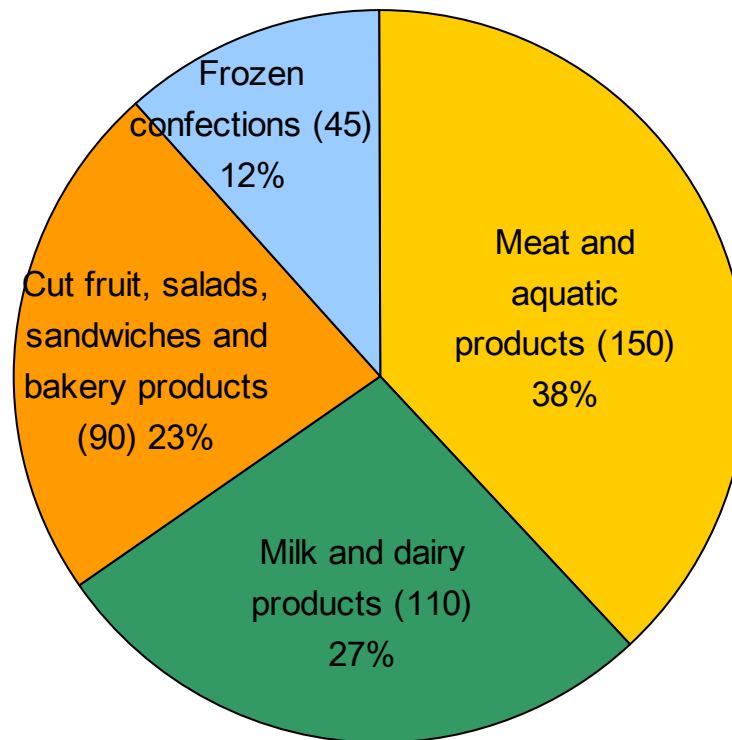
# Background (Cont'd)

- Although *L. monocytogenes* can be killed under normal cooking temperature, it may continue to grow slowly at refrigerated temperature as low as 0°C. This characteristic makes long shelf life (greater than five days) refrigerated ready-to-eat (RTE) food a potential high risk item for listeriosis. Prolonged storage in refrigerator may allow the bacteria to have sufficient time to grow gradually and increase the consumers' risk of contracting listeriosis.
- In view of this, the Centre for Food Safety (CFS) conducted a targeted food surveillance to assess the situation of *L.monocytogenes* in RTE food kept under refrigeration.



# Types of samples

- The CFS collected 388 samples from importers and over 200 different locations (including food premises, food factories, supermarkets, convenience stores, mobile vans and retail outlets) from January to June this year.



N.B.: Figures in brackets are rounded and may not add up to total due to rounding.

# Tests and results

- All samples were tested for *L. monocytogenes*.
- All results were satisfactory.



# Follow-up actions

- Although all the samples tested were satisfactory, CFS will continue to enhance publicity and education targeted to high-risk groups, particularly pregnant women, e.g., through development, production and dissemination of electronic publications such as "Food Safety Focus", leaflets such as "Prevention of foodborne diseases in women planning to become pregnant, pregnant and lactating", etc.
- Besides, in view of the potential risk of *L. monocytogenes* in food, CFS is planning to carry out further study on food which is of higher *L. monocytogenes* risk.
- CFS will also continue the collaboration with CHP in investigation of listeriosis, and take samples of suspectedly affected food for analysis when necessary.

# Advice for the trade

- Proper food handling by applying 5 keys to food safety.
  - e.g. Keep perishable foods at 4°C or below inside refrigerators and avoid cross-contamination.
- Estimate the demand of each food carefully to avoid over-production.



# Advice for consumers

- Maintain food and personal hygiene.
- Keep perishable foods at 4°C or below inside refrigerators and avoid cross-contamination.
- People belong to high risk group should avoid high risk foods especially refrigerated ready-to-eat foods with long shelf life.

