
Targeted Food Surveillance on Microbiological Quality of Lunch Boxes

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Background

- The hot and humid summer is conducive to the growth of pathogens in foods.
- Previously, there were cases of bacterial food poisoning associated with lunch boxes supplied by food premises.
- Objective
 - To assess the microbiological quality of lunch boxes, CFS conducted a targeted food surveillance from May to June 2007.

Types of test

- 150 samples of lunch boxes were collected from food factories and restaurants. They were subjected to microbiological testing including pathogens such as:
 - ❑ *Salmonella spp.*
 - ❑ *Staphylococcus aureus*
 - ❑ *Clostridium perfringens*
 - ❑ *Bacillus cereus*

Results

- All of the 150 samples were found to be satisfactory.

Advice for trade

- Cook food thoroughly.
- Avoid preparing food too far in advance.
- Keep hot foods at 60 °C or higher and cold foods at 4 °C or below.
- Never leave lunch boxes at room temperature for longer than 2 hours.
- Food handlers should observe strict personal hygiene.

Advice for schools and institutions

- Lunch boxes should be kept in insulated containers at 60°C or above until they are ready for consumption.
- Shorten the time for storage of lunch boxes as far as practicable.
- Tampering of the lunch boxes such as reheating or addition of gravy at the place of consumption is not advisable.
- Do not consume if abnormalities are detected.

Advice for consumers

- Purchase lunch boxes from hygienic and reliable sources.
- Wash hands thoroughly before meal.
- Consume the lunch boxes as soon as possible.