

---

# Targeted food surveillance – Preservatives in preserved fruits and vegetables

---

Centre for Food Safety  
Food and Environmental Hygiene Department

January 2013

# Background

- Preservatives (e.g. sulphur dioxide, benzoic acid and sorbic acid) are commonly used in preserving fruits and vegetables.
- The Centre for Food Safety (CFS) notes that there had been levels of excessive preservatives detected in samples of preserved fruits and vegetables.
- In view of this, a targeted food surveillance project conducted by the CFS is continued in 2012 to assess the situation.

# Types of samples

- The CFS collected 450 samples for testing from October to November 2012.
- Types of samples
  - preserved vegetables (such as cucumber, radish, leaf mustard, rakkyo, ginger and chilies)
  - preserved fruits (such as dried mango, dried pineapple, raisin, apricots, plums, dried apple ring, sour peach and olives)
- Testing items
  - preservatives (including sulphur dioxide, benzoic acid, sorbic acid and parabens)

# Unsatisfactory samples

- There was only 2 unsatisfactory food sample. The overall satisfactory rate was 99.6%.

Sample	Unsatisfactory testing item	Result
Preserved sweet potato *	Sorbic acid	472 ppm <sup>(1)</sup>
Preserved pummelo *	Benzoic acid	1300 ppm <sup>(2)</sup>

- (1) A commonly used preservative but is not permitted in this kind of food. It is of low toxicity and will not pose adverse health effect to consumers.
- (2) The detected levels exceeded legal limits (1000 ppm), but they are of low toxicity and will not cause adverse health effects.

\* The result has been announced in the Food Safety Report for November 2012.

# Follow up actions

- Trace source of food items in question.
- Request the vendors concerned to stop sale and dispose of incriminated food items.
- Issue warning letters to the vendors concerned.
- Take follow-up samples for analysis.
- Take prosecution actions if there is sufficient evidence.

# Advice for the trade

- Use of preservatives is regulated under the Preservatives in Food Regulation, Cap.132 BD. The maximum penalty for conviction is a fine of \$50,000 and imprisonment for 6 months.
- Adhere to Good Manufacturing Practice (GMP) and comply with the legal requirements when using preservatives.
- The trade should source food from reliable suppliers and maintain a good recording system in accordance with the Food Safety Ordinance to allow source tracing if needed.

# Advice for consumers

- Patronize reliable retailers.
- Take a balanced diet so as to avoid excessive intake of certain harmful substances as a result of frequent consumption of a small range of food items.