

Survey on Popular Food Items: Vegetarian food

Centre for Food Safety

Food and Environmental Hygiene Department

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Background

- In June 2010, 26 clusters of food poisoning related to Chinese vegetarian Lo Mei were reported to the Centre for Food Safety (CFS).
- The outbreak, involving a total of 83 persons, was associated with consumption of vegetarian Lo Mei purchased from the take away section of a vegetarian restaurant. The safety of vegetarian food has become a public concern again.
- In view of this, the CFS has conducted a survey on vegetarian food recently to assess their safety.

Types of samples tested

- The CFS collected 300 food samples of various types for testing from more than 150 retailers.

Type of food	Number of samples	Percentage
Vegetarian Lo Mei	52	17
Snacks/buns	105	35
Main dishes	95	32
Congee, noodle and rice dishes	18	6
Desserts and others	30	10
Total	300	100%

N.B.: Figures may not add up to total due to rounding.

Vegetarian Lo Mei

- Samples included different flavours of vegetarian Lo Mei.



Snacks/buns

- Samples included vegetarian dumpling, fried taro dumpling, puff pastry with shredded radish, lotus paste bun, and turnip cake.



Main dishes

- Samples included vegetarian fish with shredded ingredients in sweet and sour sauce, deep fried vegetarian prawn, black mushroom and tofu, and fried French beans with preserved vegetables.



Congee, noodle and rice dishes

- Samples included congee with sweet corn, fried noodle with mixed vegetables, and baked taro and rice.



Desserts and others

- Samples included water chestnut cake, red bean cake, and crispy red bean paste pancake.



Types of tests

Microbiological tests

- It included tests of common pathogens such as *Bacillus cereus*, *Clostridium perfringens*, *Salmonella* and *Staphylococcus aureus*.

Chemical tests

- It covered common hazards such as colouring matters, metallic contamination, preservatives and pesticides.

Overall results

- All 300 samples passed the tests.



Advice to the trade

- Although all samples passed the tests, the trade should always comply with hygienic practices including:
 - ❑ maintaining good personal hygiene;
 - ❑ washing raw materials thoroughly;
 - ❑ cooking food thoroughly;
 - ❑ separating raw food from ready-to-eat food to prevent cross contamination; and
 - ❑ keeping food at safe temperatures (4°C or below; above 60°C)
- Should comply with the legal requirements and follow Good Manufacturing Practice (GMP). They should use permitted food additives only in an appropriate manner.

Advice to consumers

- Buy food only from licensed and reliable food premises.
- Take note of the storage conditions of food. Do not purchase food which has been improperly stored, e.g., those not covered well or kept under ambient temperature for prolonged period.
- Do not eat food which is undercooked, inadequately reheated or with abnormal colour and taste.