

Survey on Popular Food Items: Hong Kong Style Desserts

Centre for Food Safety

Food and Environmental Hygiene Department

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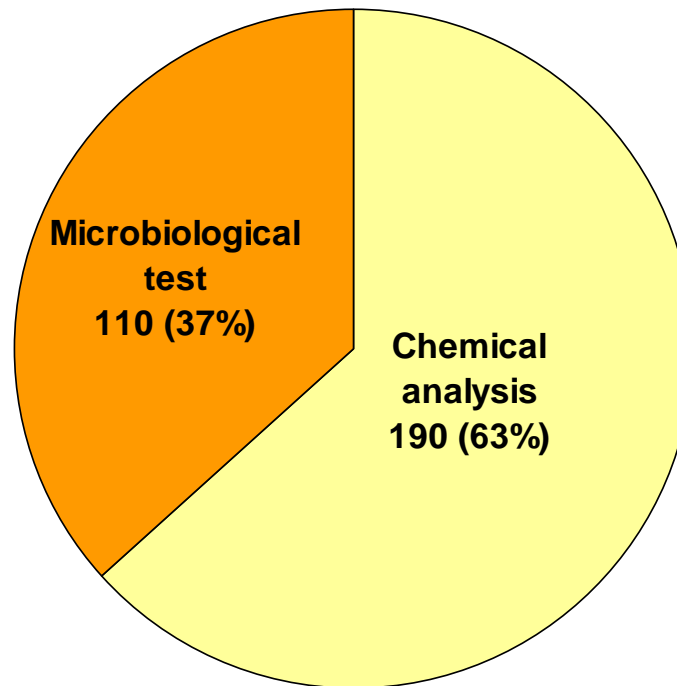
Background

- Desserts are popular in Hong Kong. They are tasteful, ready-to-eat and in great variety. Various kinds of desserts can be bought readily from convenience stores, supermarkets, restaurants and snack shops. Therefore, their safety is a local concern.
- The Centre for Food Safety (CFS) recently conducted a survey on desserts.
- Tests include microbiological testing and chemical analysis.



Types of analysis

- Microbiological testing
- Chemical analysis



Testing items

Microbiological testing

- Includes pathogens such as *Salmonella*, *Staphylococcus aureus*, *Bacillus cereus*, *Clostridium perfringens* and *Listeria monocytogenes*.
- Some desserts have relatively high content of water and nutrients and may be stored at ambient temperature. As such, they can be a good medium for microbial growth if there is contamination.



Testing items (cont'd)

Chemical analysis

- (1) Includes colouring matters and sweeteners.
 - Some desserts are characterized by their attractive colour and taste. Hence, colouring matters and sweeteners may have been added to achieve such effects.



Testing items (cont'd)

Chemical analysis

- (2) Includes antioxidants and preservatives.
 - Some desserts are pre-packaged. Antioxidants and/or preservatives may have been added to prevent spoilage and discolouration after prolonged storage.



Testing items (cont'd)

Chemical analysis (3)

- (3) Includes aflatoxin in nut-containing desserts as nuts may be contaminated naturally.



Types of food tested

- 300 samples of various desserts were collected from about 140 premises including restaurants, retail outlets and food factories for testing.

Type of food	No. of samples	Percentage
Sweet soup	168	56%
Cake/Pudding	132	44%
Total	300	100%

Sweet soup

- Samples include mung bean sweet soup, red bean sweet soup, grapefruit and sago sweet soup, sago sweet soup, black glutinous rice sweet soup, sesame sweet soup, almond sweet soup, walnut sweet soup, sweet potato sweet soup, etc.



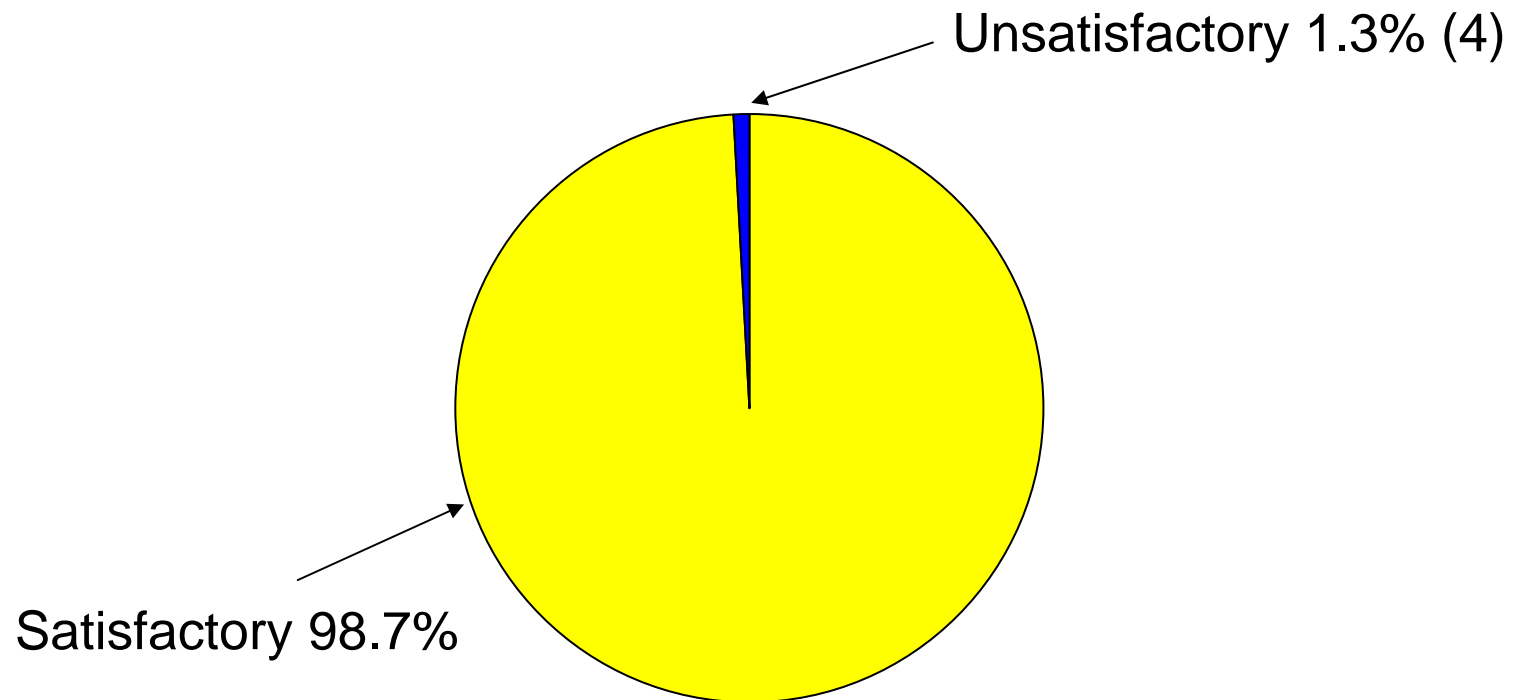
Cake/Pudding

- Samples include steamed rice cup cake, white sugar sponge cake, red bean pudding, mung bean pudding, “Mai-lai” cake, yellow bean with coconut pudding, agar pudding, osmanthus pudding, etc.



Overall results

- 4 samples were unsatisfactory. Overall satisfactory rate was 98.7%.



Unsatisfactory samples

■ 4 unsatisfactory samples:

Sample	Unsatisfactory testing item	Result ⁽¹⁾
Mung bean sweet soup with root starch jelly	Boric acid	830 ppm
Bean curd sheet sweet soup with root starch jelly and its follow-up sample	Boric acid	1200 - 1500 ppm
Follow-up sample of root starch jelly (uncooked) from the concerned supplier	Boric acid	11000 ppm

- (1) Boric acid is not permitted in food. Based on the detected level, it should not pose significant health effect on consumers upon normal consumption. Excessive intake of food containing boric acid can produce gastrointestinal symptoms in humans, including vomiting, diarrhoea and abdominal pain. Chronic excessive consumption can lead to hair loss.

Follow-up actions

- Issue warning letters to concerned vendors.
- Take follow-up samples.
- Take prosecution actions if there is sufficient evidence.

Advice for trade

- All unsatisfactory samples involved the use of non-permitted food additive. Food manufacturers should :
 - ❑ use only permitted food additives
 - ❑ follow good manufacturing practice and use food additives appropriately
 - ❑ comply with legal requirements for manufacturing food products.



Advice for trade

- Although all samples for microbiological testing were satisfactory, the trade should always comply with hygienic practices:
 - ❑ maintain good personal hygiene
 - ❑ wash raw materials thoroughly
 - ❑ cook food thoroughly
 - ❑ separate raw food from ready-to-eat food to prevent cross contamination
 - ❑ always cover food properly (including those for display) and keep food at safe temperatures (4°C or below; above 60 °C)

Advice for consumers

- Buy food only from reliable licensed retail outlets.
- Note the food storage conditions. Do not purchase prepackaged foods which are opened or with broken packages. Do not purchase desserts which are not properly stored.
- Pay attention to the expiry date of the pre-packaged food.
- Do not consume food of abnormal colour and taste.
- Maintain a balanced diet. Avoid eating desserts in excess as some of them are high in energy, sugar and fat.