

# Targeted Food Surveillance — Microbiological Quality of Lunch Boxes

Centre for Food Safety

Food and Environmental Hygiene Department

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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.
- The Centre for Food Safety conducted a targeted food surveillance from April to May 2009 to assess the microbiological quality of lunch boxes.

# Types of test and result

- 300 samples of lunch boxes were collected from different food factories for testing pathogens.
  - ❑ *Vibrio parahaemolyticus*
  - ❑ *Salmonella* organisms
  - ❑ *Staphylococcus aureus*
  - ❑ *Clostridium perfringens*
  - ❑ *Bacillus cereus*
  
- All sample results were satisfactory

# Advice for trade

- Follow the “Five Keys to Food Safety” in food production to prevent food borne diseases:
  - ❑ Choose safe raw materials
  - ❑ Keep hands and utensils clean
  - ❑ Separate raw and cooked food
  - ❑ Cook thoroughly
  - ❑ Keep food at safe temperature

# Advice for schools and institutions

- Lunch boxes should be kept in insulated containers above 60°C 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.