

Targeted Food Surveillance – Sulphur Dioxide in Meat

Centre for Food Safety

Food and Environmental Hygiene Department

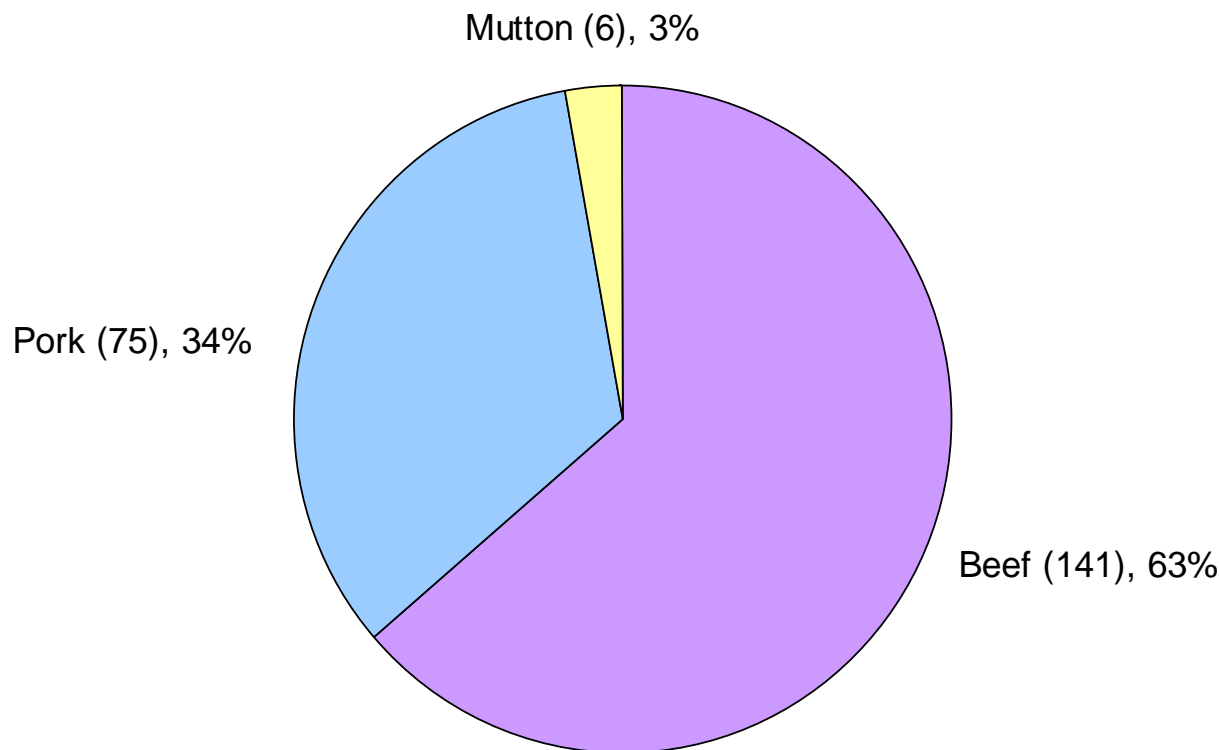
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Background

- Sulphur dioxide is a food preservative commonly used in juice and preserved fruits. However, under the law, selling fresh, chilled or frozen meat containing sulphur dioxide is an offence.
- Given the perishable nature of meat, individual meat traders had been found to use sulphur dioxide against the law so as to make the colour of meat apparently fresher.
- The Centre for Food Safety (CFS) has repeatedly detected meat samples containing sulphur dioxide in recent years. The targeted food surveillance is continued this year to assess the use of sulphur dioxide in meat.

Types of meat samples tested

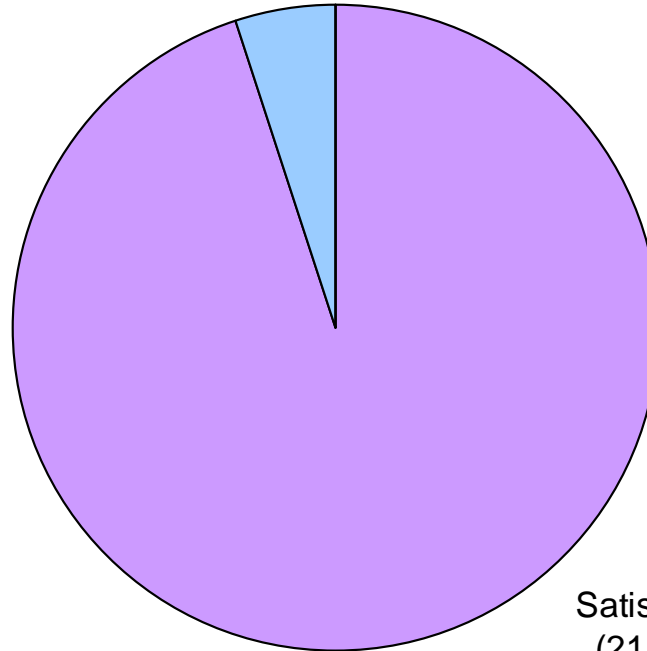
- 222 samples were collected for testing of sulphur dioxide. The sampling locations covered the meat stalls which have previous records of selling meat containing sulphur dioxide.



Overall results

- Overall satisfactory rate was 95%.

Unsatisfactory 5%
(11 samples)



Satisfactory 95%
(211 samples)

Unsatisfactory samples

- There were 11 samples, including 9 fresh beef and 2 fresh pork, found to contain sulphur dioxide at levels between 20 and 390 ppm.
- Totally 9 meat stalls were involved. Of which, 5 were repeated offenders.

Follow up actions

- Issue warning letters.
- Carry out investigation and take follow up samples.
- Take prosecution actions if there is sufficient evidence.
- CFS will closely monitor the situation.

Advice for trade

- The trade should not use sulphur dioxide in fresh, chilled or frozen meat. Under the Preservatives in Food Regulations, selling fresh, chilled or frozen meat containing preservatives is an offence and the maximum penalty is a fine of \$50,000 and six months' imprisonment.
- According to “Demerit Point System” of licensed food premises, the Food and Environmental Health Department (FEHD) will register demerit points against the licensed fresh provision shop. For repeated offenders, suspension or cancellation of licence will be imposed.
- For public market stalls, tenancy may be terminated in case the tenants have been convicted of the Public Health and Municipal Services Ordinance, Cap 132 and its subsidiary legislations.

Advice for consumers

- Sulphur dioxide is a preservative commonly used in juice and preserved fruits. It is of low toxicity and based on the detected levels, it should not pose adverse health effects on consumers upon normal consumption of meat. As sulphur dioxide is water soluble, most of it can also be removed through washing and cooking.
- For susceptible individuals who are allergic to sulphur dioxide, they may experience breathing difficulty, headaches and nausea.
- Consumers should purchase meat from reliable market stalls or fresh provision shops.
- Take a balanced diet so as to avoid excessive exposure to food additives from a small range of food items.