

**For Discussion  
On 8 March 2011**

**LegCo Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene  
Report on the Food Surveillance Programme for 2010**

**PURPOSE**

This paper briefs Members on the work of the Centre for Food Safety (CFS) in respect of the Food Surveillance Programme (the Programme) for 2010 and reports on the major surveillance results for the period and the follow-up actions taken.

**FOOD SURVEILLANCE PROGRAMME**

2. The CFS adopts the World Health Organization's "from farm to table" framework to ensure food safety in Hong Kong. Control at source includes allowing only the supply of food produced by approved farms/processing plants with audit inspections, and the requirements of health certificates for certain food animals and food products, etc. At downstream stages of the food supply chain, the Programme is a key component to ensure food safety.

3. The Programme monitors foods offered for sale to ensure their compliance with legal requirements and fitness for human consumption. Samples are collected at import, wholesale and retail levels for microbiological and chemical testing.

4. The CFS adopts a three-tier food surveillance strategy, consisting of routine food surveillance, targeted food surveillance and seasonal food surveillance. In addition, the CFS also conducts surveys on popular local food items to assess the safety of commonly consumed food items. The CFS completed 12 targeted food surveillance projects, five seasonal food surveillance projects and three surveys on popular local food items in 2010. Details of these projects are set out in **Annex**.

5. The CFS adopts a risk-based approach when determining the types of food samples to be collected, the frequency and number of samples for testing, and the types of laboratory analyses to be conducted. The sampling programme is under regular review, taking into account factors such as past food surveillance results, food incidents occurring both locally and overseas, and associated risk analysis. For example, the number of meat samples collected for sulphur dioxide testing was increased in 2010 due to relatively high unsatisfactory rate in 2009, and a broader range of pesticides was covered in preparation for the new pesticide regulation under planning. The projects under the Programme were also endorsed by the Expert Committee on Food Safety.

6. For unsatisfactory samples, the CFS takes effective risk management actions to control risks and minimise exposure to such products. These actions include issuing warning letters to the concerned vendors/manufacturers, tracing the source and distribution, requiring the concerned traders to stop sale, recall and dispose of the affected food and taking follow-up samples. Prosecution will be taken against cases with sufficient evidence of breach of legislation.

## **RESULTS ANNOUNCEMENT**

7. The CFS releases food testing results in a timely manner. Food surveillance results with immediate public health concerns, such as identification of high level of paralytic shellfish poisoning toxin in scallop in May 2010, will be released immediately. Results of the targeted surveillance projects are released upon project completion, while the results of seasonal food surveillance projects are announced ahead of the relevant season and festival for consumers to make informed choices. The CFS also announces all surveillance results of the previous month by a monthly Food Safety Report.

8. The results are announced in press releases and also presented in a user-friendly format in the CFS website. Apart from announcing results, the CFS also gives advice to consumers to minimise health risks posed by problem foods.

**OVERALL RESULTS**

9. During 2010, about 63 000 testing results were received by the CFS and a total of 164 samples were found to be unsatisfactory, with an overall satisfactory rate of 99.7%. Amongst them, results of pesticides in vegetables and fruits, dioxins and melamine in various food items and some seasonal foods such as mooncakes, Poon Choi and hairy crabs were all 100% satisfactory.

10. Moreover, the CFS had strengthened surveillance in response to public concerns on food incidents, such as the suspected contamination of Mainland milk powder by sex hormones in August 2010. The CFS immediately took relevant samples from the local market for testing and all results were satisfactory.

<b>Food group</b>	<b>Number of unsatisfactory samples</b>	<b>Major problems (number of unsatisfactory samples)</b>
Vegetables, fruits and products	25	Preservatives(12), metallic contamination(10), pathogens(2), colouring matters(1)
Meat, poultry and products	27	Sulphur dioxide in fresh meat(17), veterinary drug residues(5), pathogens(2), colouring matters(2), preservatives(1)
Aquatic products	41	Veterinary drug residues(15), metallic contamination(13), pathogens(6), preservatives(4), toxins(2), norovirus nucleic acid in raw oysters(1)
Milk, milk products and frozen confections	49	Hygienic indicators(48), pathogens(1)
Cereal, grains and products	1	Preservatives(1)
Others	21	Pathogens(11), preservatives(6), colouring matters(3), veterinary drug residues(1)

11. Most of the unsatisfactory samples were not serious cases and would not pose adverse health effect to the general public. Some highlights of the unsatisfactory samples are as follows:

**I. Malachite Green (a veterinary drug residue) in Fish**

12. Of the more than 1 000 aquatic products tested for veterinary drug residues, malachite green (MG) was found in 12 fish samples. At the levels detected, normal consumption would unlikely pose adverse health effects. As it is a statutory requirement that MG should not be present in any food sold in Hong Kong, the CFS has taken enforcement action and stopped the sale of the affected products.

13. For those samples with available information on the source, the CFS has informed the exporting countries of such findings. The CFS will continue to strengthen the surveillance of MG in fish in 2011.

**II. Metallic Contaminants in Aquatic Products and Vegetables**

14. In 2010, the CFS detected 13 aquatic products and ten vegetable samples containing excessive metallic contaminants. For instance, excessive mercury was detected in large predatory fishes (such as swordfish) and excessive cadmium was found in bivalve shellfish (such as fan scallop), crustaceans (such as crab) and vegetables (such as watercress).

15. Enforcement actions have been taken to dispose of the affected food. As metallic contaminants in food mainly come from the environment, it is more effective to control such hazards at the source of food production. For unsatisfactory samples with identified sources, the CFS has notified the authorities of the exporting countries for follow-up.

**III. Shellfish and Paralytic Shellfish Poisoning (PSP)**

16. The Programme detected two unsatisfactory samples for PSP toxin, one in January and the other in May 2010. The sample taken in January was a frozen scallop imported with a health certificate. The CFS informed the exporting authorities and issued a press release in a timely manner to inform the public. No associated poisoning case was reported to the CFS.

17. Upon detection of a PSP outbreak after consumption of scallops in May 2010, the Department of Health immediately appealed to the public not to consume the concerned products. A sample of fan scallop taken during investigation was found to contain a high level of PSP toxin. Enforcement action was taken to dispose of the affected food products. However, the concerned retailer was unable to provide information on the source.

#### **IV. Hygiene Indicators for Imported Milk Products and Frozen Confections**

18. In 2010, when taking samples at import level, the CFS detected that the level of hygiene indicators (total bacterial count and coliform organisms) in five consignments of imported milk products and frozen confections exceeded the legal standards of Hong Kong. All these consignments did not enter the market. The respective authorities of the exporting countries were notified for follow-up action. Further imports of the products in question have been suspended pending satisfactory remedial actions from the importers / manufacturers.

### **CONCLUSIONS**

19. The overall satisfactory rate of food tested under the Programme has consistently been over 99%. We envisage that the new Food Safety Bill, when passed, will enhance the ability of the CFS to trace the source of food. Prompt actions can then be taken to ensure food safety when unsatisfactory samples are found.

20. The CFS will continue to review the risk-based Food Surveillance Programme by duly taking local and international food safety issues into consideration.

### **ADVICE SOUGHT**

21. Members are invited to note and comment on the Food Surveillance Programme of the CFS for 2010.

**Food and Health Bureau  
Food and Environmental Hygiene Department  
Centre for Food Safety**

**March 2011**

**Annex**

**Projects under the 2010 Food Surveillance Programme**

(A) Routine Food Surveillance

It covered major food groups such as fruits and vegetables, meat, poultry, aquatic products, milk and cereals. The CFS took samples by using a risk-based approach for chemical and microbiological analyses.

(B) Targeted Food Surveillance

- (i) *Enterobacter Sakazakii* in powdered infant formula
- (ii) Microbiological quality of ice-cream and frozen confections
- (iii) Microbiological quality of refrigerated pre-packaged boxed meal that required reheating before consumption
- (iv) Microbiological quality of lunch boxes
- (v) Sulphur dioxide in meat (2 phases)
- (vi) Formaldehyde in noodlefish
- (vii) Microbiological quality of Chinese cold dishes
- (viii) Microbiological quality of bottled water
- (ix) Sudan dyes in eggs and egg products
- (x) Nitrate and nitrite in meat, meat products and cheese
- (xi) Preservatives in preserved fruits and vegetables

(C) Seasonal Food Surveillance

- (i) Lunar New Year food
- (ii) Rice dumplings
- (iii) Mooncakes
- (iv) Hairy crabs
- (v) Microbiological quality of Poon Choi

(D) Survey on Popular Food Items

- (i) Southeast Asian Food
- (ii) Chinese Regional Cuisines (2 phases)