

**For discussion  
on 10 January 2012**

**LegCo Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene**

**Announcement Mechanisms of the Centre for Food Safety**

**Purpose**

This paper gives an account of the announcement mechanisms of the Centre for Food Safety (CFS) in respect of the Food Surveillance Programme, food incident management, risk assessment studies and other food safety information, as well as an overview of various communication channels between CFS and stakeholders like the food trade and consumers.

**Announcement Mechanism of the Food Surveillance Programme**

2. As a key component of CFS' measures to safeguard food safety, the Food Surveillance Programme (Programme) monitors foods offered for sale to ensure their compliance with legal requirements and fitness for human consumption. CFS takes food samples at import, wholesale and retail levels and adopts a risk-based approach in determining the types of 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, and takes into account factors such as past food surveillance results, food incidents occurring both locally and overseas, and associated risk analysis. CFS will consult the Expert Committee on Food Safety (the Expert Committee) on projects under the Programme and implement relevant work after they were endorsed by the Expert Committee.

3. The three-pronged food surveillance strategy consists of routine food surveillance, targeted food surveillance and seasonal food surveillance. In addition, CFS also conducts surveys on popular food items to assess the safety of food items commonly consumed in Hong Kong.

4. CFS releases food surveillance results in a timely manner. The results of targeted food surveillance projects and surveys on popular food items are released upon completion, while the results of seasonal food surveillance projects are announced ahead of the relevant season and festival to enable

consumers to make informed choices. CFS also announces all surveillance results of the previous month by a monthly Food Safety Report.

5. For testing results which imply threats to public health or arouse immediate health concern among the public, CFS issues press releases immediately in order to reduce the possibility of danger to public health and warn the public against consuming the affected food.

6. Apart from announcing through press releases, CFS also releases the food surveillance results on its website. CFS also gives advice to consumers on how to minimise health risks posed by problem foods.

### **Food Incident Management and Announcement Mechanism**

7. Hong Kong imports most of its food from the Mainland and foreign countries (e.g. the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand, etc). In order to prevent and control major food safety problems, CFS closely monitors, on a daily basis, food incidents occurring in Hong Kong, the Mainland and other countries and takes actions accordingly to ensure food safety in Hong Kong and protect public health.

8. Upon detection of a food incident, CFS will make a preliminary evaluation based on the available information. If it cannot be ruled out that the affected batch of food is on sale in Hong Kong, CFS will, on the same day, notify the trade by issuing food alerts, advise the trade to stop selling the food and urge them to contact the CFS as soon as possible. Meanwhile, CFS will liaise with the relevant authorities to obtain further information on export and will deploy staff to check whether the affected batch of food is on sale in Hong Kong. If it is confirmed that such food is on sale in Hong Kong, CFS will issue a press release immediately to advise the public to stop consuming the food. CFS will also take samples as appropriate for testing of the hazardous substances to decide whether further action should be taken. The Director of the Food and Environmental Hygiene could make orders to prohibit the import and supply of the problem food, and direct that any such food supplied be recalled to prevent or reduce a possibility of danger to public health brought by such problem food. CFS will also make announcements on the relevant orders to the trade and the public.

## **Announcement Mechanism of Risk Assessment Studies**

9. CFS adopts the risk analysis framework promulgated by international food safety authorities in controlling food safety. Risk assessment is an essential part of risk analysis which forms the scientific basis for control actions. Every year, CFS conducts a number of risk assessment studies to review and analyse food related hazards (e.g. chemical hazards, microbiological hazards) that are closely related to public health, so as to formulate appropriate risk management actions and risk communication messages to protect public health. CFS commenced the first Hong Kong Total Diet Study in 2010 to estimate dietary exposures to food chemicals or nutrients for various population groups and to assess their associated health risks. The study is scheduled for completion in 2014. Meanwhile, CFS collaborates with the Consumer Council every year to conduct a number of studies. For example, two joint studies were conducted in 2011, namely the “Microbiological Quality of Non-hot Served Sweet Food in Hong Kong” and the “Microbiological Quality of Higher Risk Buns and Sandwiches in Hong Kong”.

10. For every risk assessment study conducted, CFS will make recommendations to the food trade and draw up trade guidelines as necessary. To facilitate the trade’s understanding of these studies and collect their views on any recommendations made and draft guidelines, CFS generally will brief the trade and listen to their views at meetings of the Trade Consultation Forum which are held regularly before announcing study findings and relevant recommendations. Detailed study findings are subsequently publicised by means of press releases, education pamphlets, trade guidelines, etc. Reports of the risk assessment studies and relevant recommendations to the public and the trade are also posted on CFS website for reference. These reports are also available in public libraries and major educational institutions.

11. Studies which CFS conducts in collaboration with the Consumer Council are also released in a timely manner upon completion. If trade guidelines are drawn up, CFS will seek the trade’s views on the draft guidelines at meetings of the Trade Consultation Forum. Subsequently, CFS and the Consumer Council will announce the study findings through press conferences and/or press releases. In addition to announcing the findings, CFS also gives recommendations to consumers on how to lower the related risks. Details of the findings and recommendations are published in the Choice Magazine and posted on CFS website. CFS also disseminates the findings and recommendations to the public through various channels (e.g. education pamphlets, periodic publications and seminars, etc.).

12. As in the case of other risk assessment studies, the findings in the First Hong Kong Total Diet Study Report were announced through a press conference and press release in December 2011 according to the above arrangement. Details of the findings and recommendations have also been posted on CFS website.

### **Communication with Stakeholders**

13. Tripartite collaboration among the Government, the trade and consumers is essential in ensuring food safety. Since its establishment in 2006, CFS has been committed to strengthening communication with the trade and consumers through multiple communication mechanisms and avenues, such as the Trade Consultation Forum and the Consumer Liaison Group, in order to enhance risk communication with the public and the trade, and to solicit their views. Over the years, CFS has made considerable accomplishments in its risk communication work.

14. The Trade Consultation Forum mentioned in paragraphs 10 and 11 above is an open platform for CFS to exchange views on food safety matters with the trade and discuss food safety control measures as well as risk communication activities. Prior to each meeting of the Forum, CFS will invite various food trade associations, food manufacturers, food importers and wholesalers, supermarket operators and retailers to attend the meeting. The details of the meeting and enrolment form will be posted on the Forum's webpage. The respective notes of meetings are also available on the webpage for reference by the trade after the meetings. Since 2006, six meetings of the Trade Consultation Forum have been held each year on average.

15. Apart from organising regular consultation forums, CFS also sets up various working groups for the food trade where necessary, in order to exchange views on food safety matters and work closely with them in drawing up guidelines on safe production of foods. When drawing up trade guidelines, CFS will post the draft guidelines on its website for collecting views from the trade and discuss it at the meetings of the Trade Consultation Forum. Viable comments collected will be incorporated into the relevant guidelines. For instance, CFS and the Consumer Council have jointly conducted a study on "Microbiological Quality of Higher Risk Buns and Sandwiches in Hong Kong". In order to help the food trade implement food safety measures in their operations so as to produce and sell wholesome and safe buns and sandwiches, in particular coconut and cream buns and hot dogs which may have higher microbiological risks, CFS has drawn up the "Draft Trade Guidelines on Safe Production of Buns and Sandwiches" based on the study findings. The draft

guidelines were posted on the CFS website on 9 December 2011 and discussed at the meeting of the Trade Consultation Forum held on the same day for collecting views from the trade. The period for collecting views was closed on 31 December 2011 and viable views will be incorporated into the final version. The final guidelines will be distributed and posted on CFS website for reference and practice by the trade.

16. The Consumer Liaison Group set up by CFS provides a platform for direct communication with the public on various food safety issues so as to collect suggestions and comments from them; and to understand the public's knowledge, beliefs and risk perception on various food safety issues in order to tailor-make risk communication messages to meet their needs. CFS organises a number of meetings and activities for the Consumer Liaison Group every year.

### **Advice Sought**

17. Members are invited to note the announcement mechanisms implemented by CFS in respect of the Food Surveillance Programme, food incident management and risk assessment studies, and CFS' mechanism of communication with stakeholders like the food trade and consumers.

**Food and Health Bureau  
Food and Environmental Hygiene Department  
Centre for Food Safety  
January 2012**