

(Translation)

(Letterhead of Food and Health Bureau)

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8 May 2015

Clerk to LegCo Panel on Food Safety and  
Environmental Hygiene  
(Attn.: Ms Alice LEUNG)  
Legislative Council Complex  
1 Legislative Council Road  
Central, Hong Kong  
(Fax: 2509 9055)

Dear Ms Leung,

### **Concern about Substantial Rise in Hepatitis A Cases**

Thank you for referring to us the letters of Hon MAK and Hon KWOK.  
Regarding the captioned issue, our reply is as follows:

2. It was stated in the letters that the suspected mode of infection of a hepatitis A case circulated on online media had aroused the concern of some members of the public. In fact, after knowing of the outbreak of hepatitis A in Australia in mid-February 2015, the Centre for Food Safety (CFS) had conducted investigations and taken precautionary measures. The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) noted that the number of hepatitis A cases detected in 2015 is more than those in the past few years. However, an epidemiological investigation by CHP indicated that there is no sufficient evidence linking the 64 reported cases of hepatitis A with the consumption of berries.

3. As there were occasional outbreaks outside Hong Kong of hepatitis A resulting from consumption of contaminated berries, the Codex Alimentarius

Commission and the Governments of many countries had examined the feasibility of including the testing of hepatitis A virus (HAV) into their regular surveillance programmes. They have found that routine testing for HAV in food is of limited use because (i) the virus in contaminated food is usually present at such low levels that it cannot be detected by available analytical methods; (ii) the virus can be unevenly distributed and a test result may be negative but the food is still unsafe; and (iii) the presence of HAV genes in the food does not mean the virus is active.

4. Since the incident has aroused wide public concern, CFS and CHP made special arrangements a few days ago to allay such concern, by taking ten samples of berry products from the market for genetic testing for HAV and all were found negative. As explained above, it is technically difficult to determine whether HAV is present in the food items. No matter whether HAV has been detected or not, the public should bear in mind that berry products are not cooked before consumption and therefore should be thoroughly washed. Besides, seafood and shellfish, especially those unwashed and uncooked, are high-risk food items for hepatitis A infection. Therefore, members of the public should avoid or reduce the risk of hepatitis A infection by paying attention to the proper handling of such food items.

5. CFS will continue to keep in view the development of the incident and work closely with CHP in protecting public health.

Yours sincerely,

(signed)

( Kenneth Chan )

for Secretary for Food and Health

c.c. Controller, Centre for Food Safety