



中華人民共和國香港特別行政區政府總部食物及衛生局  
Food and Health Bureau, Government Secretariat  
The Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region  
The People's Republic of China

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7 November 2019

Ms Maisie Lam  
Clerk to Panel  
Legislative Council Panel on Health Services  
Legislative Council Complex  
1 Legislative Council Road  
Hong Kong

Dear Ms Lam,

**Legislative Council Panel on Health Services**  
**Issues relating to Tear Gas and Oleoresin Capsicum foam**

In response to the issues raised in the letter dated 21 October 2019 from Hon Kwok Ka-ki to the Chairman of the Legislative Council Panel on Health Services, please find at **Annex** our consolidated reply in consultation with the Security Bureau, Government Laboratory, the Food and Environmental Health Department, Department of Health and Hospital Authority.

Yours sincerely,

(Ms Leonie Lee)  
for Secretary for Food and Health

c.c.

Secretary for Food and Health's Office	(Attn: Mrs Winnie Kang)
Security Bureau	(Attn: Ms Anna Leung)
Government Laboratory	(Attn: Dr Sin Wai-mei)
Food and Environmental Health Department	(Attn: Mr Fork Ping-lam)
Department of Health	(Attn: Dr Eddy Ng)
Hospital Authority	(Attn: Ms Dorothy Lam)

## **Government's Response on Tear Gas and Oleoresin Capsicum foam**

### Health effect of tear gas

Tear gas is a crowd dispersal agent and many chemicals can be used as tear gas. In general, post-exposure symptoms to tear gas may include stinging and burning sensation to eyes and other mucous membranes, tearing, salivation, runny nose, tight chest, headache, nausea, burning sensation of skin, and erythema of skin. These symptoms will usually disappear within a short time after exposure to tear gas. Information or literature on the chronic health effect of tear gas is limited. However, some studies suggest that tear gas exposure could cause persistent physical and psychological illnesses, in particular for children, elderly and patients with respiratory diseases or allergic conditions. In general, health effects of tear gas depend on a number of factors such as the specific chemical composition of the tear gas, duration and dose of exposure, exposure route, health conditions of the individuals and the physical environment during exposure. Individuals who had been exposed to tear gas with persistent symptoms should promptly consult healthcare professionals.

2. The public should leave the area affected by tear gas immediately. Skin exposed to tear gas should be washed thoroughly with water and soap and contaminated clothing should be changed. Eyes with discomfort should be irrigated with large amount of water or saline. For persons who are in an indoor environment when tear gas is being released nearby, they should close all doors and windows, turn off the air conditioner, and could seal the gaps in the doors and windows with wet towels. In consultation with relevant departments and experts, the Department of Health has uploaded health information on tear gas to the website of the Centre for Health Protection (“CHP”) for general public’s reference. Please visit the CHP website (<https://www.chp.gov.hk/en/index.html>) > Health Topics > Health and Hygiene> Health Information on Tear Gas for the information.

## Effect of tear gas on food safety

3. Whether tear gas substances would affect food safety depends on a number of factors, such as the storage conditions of the food, the duration of exposure and concentration of tear gas, etc. According to the Codex Alimentarius Commission, the international leading authority, standards for contaminants in food should be set only for those that present both a significant risk to public health and are known or expected to have problem in international trade. Currently, no assessment on the health impact of consuming food contaminated by tear gas is conducted by international food safety authorities and the relevant food safety risks are not mentioned in medical literature. According to our information, international food safety regulatory authorities and agencies of other places have not set any regulatory standards regarding tear gas residues in food.

4. To minimise contamination from micro-organisms, chemicals and foreign matters, food should be properly stored in suitable places such as clean and covered food-grade containers. Food suspected to be contaminated should not be consumed. The Centre for Food Safety (“CFS”) of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (“FEHD”) has uploaded related information to its website for general public’s reference. Please visit the CFS website (<https://www.cfs.gov.hk/english/index.html>) > Hot Topics > Advice to the Public on Contaminants and Food Safety for the information.

## Health effect of Oleoresin Capsicum foam

5. It is understood that Oleoresin Capsicum (“OC”) foam was used by the Police to stop unlawful behaviour. In general, post-exposure symptoms to OC foam may include burning sensation of skin and eye discomfort. These symptoms will usually disappear within a short time after exposure to OC foam. Skin exposed to OC foam should be washed thoroughly with water and soap and contaminated clothing should be changed. Eyes with discomfort should be irrigated with large amount of water or saline.

## Cleansing of residues

6. It is understood that tear gas is basically suspended particulates. Most of the suspended particulates will be carried away in the air after tear

gas is dispersed. Even if a trace amount of the particulates remain, the effect will be very limited. When cleaning the tear gas residual materials at home, disposable cleaning items are preferable. Suitable personal protective equipment such as masks, rubber gloves and rubber aprons should be worn. In general, surface with residual materials could be wiped by cloth soaked with soapy water but hot water should not be used in order to avoid evaporating the materials. Also, residual materials should not be stirred up and therefore tools such as high pressure water jet and brooms, as well as electric fans, should not be used. The disposable cleaning items should be properly packed (such as in a sealed plastic bag) after cleaning and then disposed. FEHD and its cleansing contractors will continue to provide cleansing services under the established mechanism, including street washing, waste collection and other cleansing work.

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