
Targeted Food Surveillance on *Staphylococcus aureus* in Ready-to-eat Food

Centre for Food Safety

Food and Environmental Hygiene Department

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Background

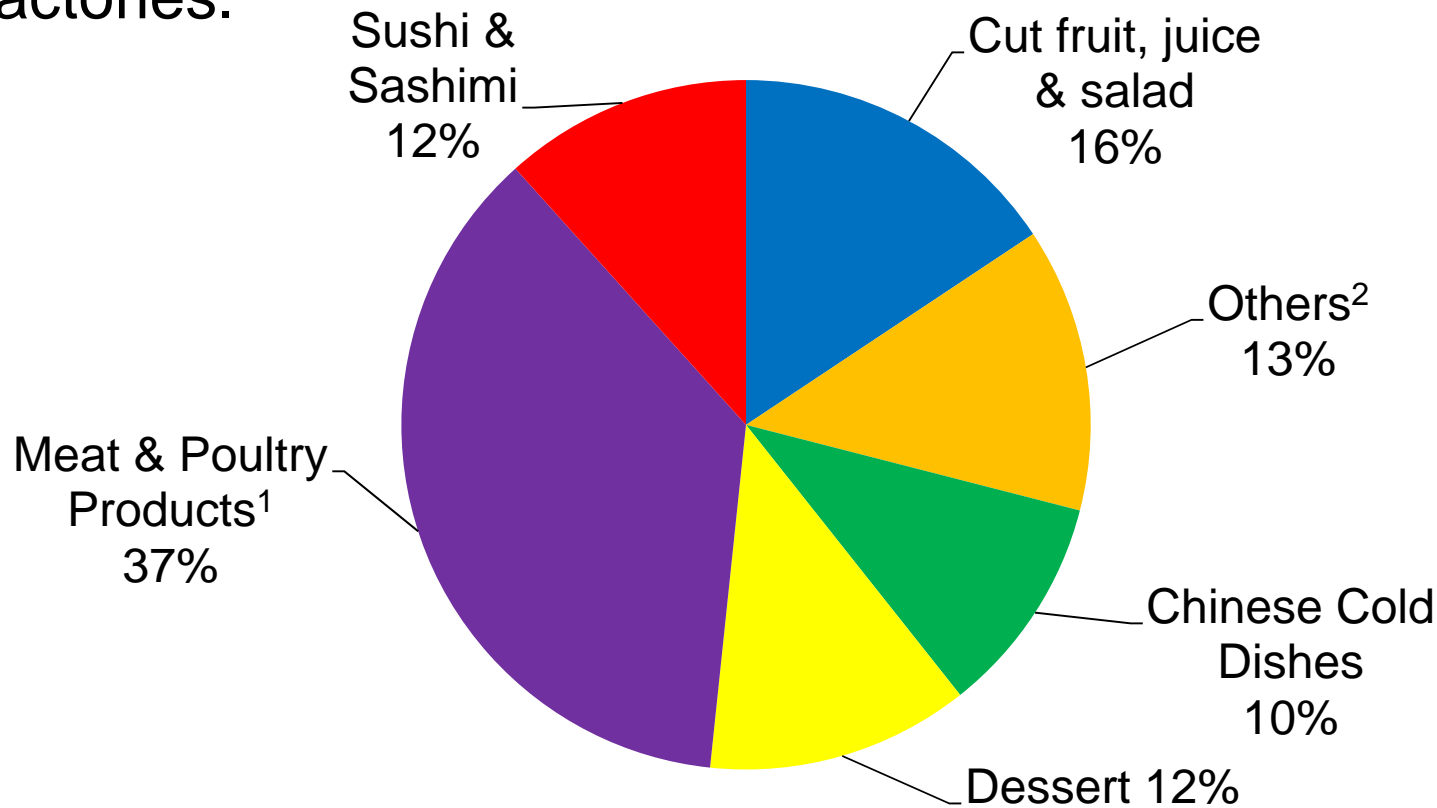
- *Staphylococcus aureus* is a common bacterium that can cause food poisoning. It exists widely in our environment and is commonly found in the nasal cavity, throat, hair and skin of healthy individuals. It presents in large numbers in wounds and infections.
- Food poisoning caused by *Staphylococcus aureus* is usually associated with consumption of food that
 - require considerable handling during preparation but without subsequent cooking, hence, *Staphylococcus aureus* can be passed from food handlers to foods; and
 - are stored at ambient temperature for a prolonged period of time that may allow the bacterium to multiply and elaborate staphylococcal enterotoxins.
- Examples are shredded chicken, siu-mei & lo-mei, Chinese cold dishes, sandwiches, salad, sushi & sashimi.

Background

- Staphylococcal enterotoxins are fast acting, sometimes causing illness in as short as 30 minutes after eating contaminated foods. Common symptoms include nausea, vomiting, and abdominal pain, often accompanied by diarrhoea.
- Recovery is usually within 2 days, but can take longer in severe cases that may require hospitalization.
- Reheating a food contaminated with enterotoxin-producing staphylococci will not be protective as cooking cannot destroy the enterotoxins.

Types of samples

- About 600 samples were collected from over 400 different locations, including retail outlets and food factories.



- ¹ such as shredded chicken, siu-mei & lo-mei.
- ² such as bakery, sandwiches & steamed rice – rolls.
- N.B.: Figures are rounded and may not add up to total due to rounding.

Tests and results

- All samples were tested for *Staphylococcus aureus*.
- All results were satisfactory.

Follow-up actions

- Although all the samples tested were satisfactory, CFS will continue to enhance publicity and education to prevent food poisoning through development, production and dissemination of publications and leaflets.
- CFS will also continue the collaboration with DH in investigation of food poisoning, and take samples of suspectedly affected food for analysis when necessary.

Advice for the trade

- Proper food handling by applying 5 keys to food safety.
- Do not entertain orders beyond handling capacity.
- The following recommendations should be noted to prevent food poisoning caused by *Staphylococcus aureus* :
 - Always wash hands thoroughly with running water and soap before and after handling foods, or after going to the toilet;
 - Cook food thoroughly and serve cooked food as soon as possible. Cold dishes should be kept at 4°C or below and hot foods at 60°C or above if it is not consumed immediately to prevent bacterial growth.
 - Avoid handling cooked foods with bare hands, and
 - Stop handling foods when there is an open wound or skin infection.

Advice for consumers

- Consumers should patronize licensed & reliable premises for buying food.
- Consider the food premises' production capacity when making massive orders.
- Avoid storage of food at ambient temperature for more than two hours.
- Discard leftovers or otherwise store them properly in the refrigerator at 4°C or below.

