
Targeted Food Surveillance — Microbiological Quality of Lunch Boxes

Centre for Food Safety

Food and Environmental Hygiene Department

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Background

- The hot and humid summer is conducive to the growth of pathogens in foods. Therefore, summer is the peak season of food poisoning. The Centre for Food Safety (CFS) periodically received complaints or reports suspected of bacterial food poisoning associated with lunch boxes supplied by food premises in recent years.
- In view of this, the CFS has been conducting a targeted food surveillance project since 2007 to assess the microbiological quality of lunch boxes.

Types of test and result

- The CFS collected 300 samples of lunch boxes from different food factories for testing pathogens from April to May this year:
 - *Vibrio parahaemolyticus*
 - *Salmonella*
 - *Staphylococcus aureus*
 - *Clostridium perfringens*
 - *Bacillus cereus*
- All sample results were satisfactory.

Advice for the food trade

- Follow the “Five Keys to Food Safety” in food production to prevent food borne diseases:
 - ❑ Choose - Choose safe raw materials
 - ❑ Clean - Keep hands and utensils clean
 - ❑ Separate - Separate raw and cooked food
 - ❑ Cook - Cook food thoroughly
 - ❑ Safe Temperature - Keep food at safe temperature

Advice for schools and institutions

- Order lunch boxes from premises with a valid food factory licence issued by the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department.
- Lunch boxes should be kept in insulated containers, with hot food maintained above 60 degrees Celsius until they are consumed.
- Shorten the time for storage of lunch boxes as far as practicable.
- Further processing of food after delivery of lunch boxes should be avoided, and lunch boxes taken out of insulated containers should be consumed as soon as possible..
- Avoid ordering high-risk food items (e.g. cold dishes like sashimi, sushi, or unthoroughly washed fresh vegetables and fruits, etc.) for young children, elders or other people with lower immunity.

Advice for consumers

- Purchase lunch boxes from hygienic and reliable sources.
- Wash hands thoroughly before meal.
- Consume the lunch boxes as soon as possible.
- Do not consume if abnormalities are detected.