

CFS announces test results of targeted surveillance on use of sulphur dioxide in meat

The Centre for Food Safety (CFS) of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) today (February 17) released the test results of a targeted food surveillance project on the use of sulphur dioxide in meat. Among some 600 samples tested – except for 12 samples found to contain sulphur dioxide, a non-permitted preservative in fresh meat, which were announced earlier – all the remaining samples passed the test. The overall satisfactory rate was 98 per cent.

"In view of the detection of the preservative in fresh meat samples in the past, the CFS has conducted targeted surveillance projects regularly on the use of the chemical in meat in recent years. Samples of beef, pork and mutton were collected from fresh provision shops, supermarkets, market meat stalls and online retailers for testing. The sampling locations also included meat shops and stalls which had previous records of selling meat containing sulphur dioxide," a spokesman for the CFS said.

Sulphur dioxide is a commonly used preservative in a variety of foods including dried fruits, pickled vegetables and meat products such as sausages and grilled burgers. However, under the Preservatives in Food Regulation (Cap 132BD), it is not permitted in fresh or chilled meat. Nonetheless, individual meat traders have been found illegally using sulphur dioxide to make meat look fresher. Sulphur dioxide is of low toxicity. As it is water-soluble, most of it can be removed through washing and cooking. However, susceptible individuals who are allergic to sulphur dioxide may experience breathing difficulties, headaches and nausea.

Under the Regulation, the maximum penalty upon conviction of using sulphur dioxide in fresh or chilled meat is a fine of \$50,000 and six months' imprisonment.

The spokesman reminded the food trade to comply with the law and not to sell fresh or chilled meat containing sulphur dioxide. Members of the public should purchase meat from reliable vendors (including market stalls, fresh provision shops and online retailers, etc.) and avoid buying or consuming meat which is unnaturally red.