

# CHP investigates food poisoning cluster

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health is today (February 20) investigating a food poisoning cluster affecting 17 persons, and reminded the public to maintain personal, food and environmental hygiene to prevent foodborne diseases.

The cluster involved three males and 14 females aged between 12 and 66, who developed abdominal pain, diarrhoea, nausea, vomiting and fever about 23 to 50 hours after having dinner at the Grand Ballroom, Hilton Garden Inn Hong Kong Mongkok, 2 Soy Street, Mong Kok on February 16.

Of those affected, nine persons sought medical advice, while one of them required hospitalisation.

A preliminary investigation by the CHP revealed that the affected persons had consumed a variety of food items, including "siu mei", namely roasted piglet and chicken and other hot dishes. Staff of the CHP and the Centre for Food Safety (CFS) of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department have conducted an investigation at the restaurant, and examined the cooking process and hygiene of the food.

The CFS's investigation revealed that the risk of cross-contamination during the preparation process could not be ruled out. The CFS immediately instructed the premises concerned to immediately stop serving all concerned food items, suspend the operation of the "siu mei" section, clean and disinfect the premises, improve the food preparation process and hygiene. The CFS also took food and environmental samples for testing, and provided food safety and environmental hygiene education to the restaurant staff.

The investigation of the CHP and CFS is ongoing. It cannot be ruled out that the number of affected persons may increase.

To prevent foodborne diseases, members of the public are reminded to maintain personal, food and environmental hygiene at all times. When dining out, one should:

- Avoid eating raw seafood;
- Be a discerning consumer in choosing cold dishes, including sashimi, sushi and raw oysters at a buffet;
- Choose pasteurised eggs, egg products or dried egg powder for dishes that often use lightly cooked or uncooked eggs;
- Patronise only reliable and licensed restaurants;
- Store and reheat precooked or leftover foods properly before consumption;
- Ensure food is thoroughly cooked before eating during a hotpot or barbecue meal;

- Handle raw and cooked foods carefully and separate them completely during the cooking process;
- Use two sets of chopsticks and utensils to handle raw and cooked foods;
- Avoid patronising illegal food hawkers;
- Drink boiled water;
- Susceptible populations, including those with weakened immunity, the elderly, pregnant women and young children are at a higher risk of foodborne diseases, so they should not consume raw or undercooked foods;
- Refrain from trying to use salt, vinegar, wine or wasabi to kill bacteria as they are not effective; and
- Always wash hands before eating and after going to the toilet.