

# Consumers urged not to consume nutmeg powder contaminated with aflatoxins

The Centre for Food Safety (CFS) of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department today (October 15) urged the public not to consume a kind of nutmeg powder as it was found contaminated with aflatoxins.

A spokesman for the CFS said, "Following up on cases referred by a relevant organisation, the CFS collected the above-mentioned sample from a shop in Sheung Wan for testing. The result showed that it contained aflatoxins at a level of 21 micrograms per kilogram."

Under the Harmful Substances in Food Regulation (Cap 132AF), the maximum permitted concentration for aflatoxins in food (except for peanuts or peanut products) is 15 micrograms per kilogram.

The spokesman said, "The CFS has informed the vendor concerned of the irregularity and instructed it to stop sale of the affected product. Prosecution will be instituted should there be sufficient evidence. The Centre is also tracing the source and distribution of the affected product."

The World Health Organization (WHO)'s International Agency for Research on Cancer classified naturally occurring aflatoxins as carcinogenic to humans, and the Joint Food and Agriculture Organization/WHO Expert Committee on Food Additives advised that intake of aflatoxins should be reduced to levels as low as reasonably possible although no health-based guidance value has been set. Aflatoxins can lead to liver cancer after long-term ingestion, and the risk for hepatitis B carriers is relatively high.

The spokesman urged members of the public who had bought the affected product to stop consuming it. To avoid excessive intake of mycotoxins, people should maintain a balanced and varied diet to minimise the risk from a small range of food items, and to avoid consuming food that looks mouldy or damaged.

The CFS will continue to follow up on the incident and take appropriate action. Investigation is ongoing.