

FEHD follows up on samples of imported frozen cuttlefish slice surface and its inner packaging that tested positive for COVID-19

The Centre for Food Safety (CFS) of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department said today (November 3) that a notification was received from the Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health yesterday evening (November 2) that samples of imported frozen cuttlefish slice surface and its inner packaging were found to be positive for the COVID-19 virus during precautionary testing.

The CFS yesterday collected 12 frozen cuttlefish slice surface samples and packaging samples for testing from a batch of 390 boxes of frozen cuttlefish slice (totalling around 3 100 kilograms) imported from Malaysia via sea. One frozen cuttlefish slice surface sample and one inner packing sample were found to be positive for the virus. The batch of cuttlefish slice has been stored inside a warehouse in Kwai Chung after import and has not entered the market.

Upon learning of the test results, the CFS has inspected the warehouse with the CHP today and asked the operator to conduct thorough cleaning and disinfection. The importer concerned has also disposed of the cuttlefish slice of the same batch upon the CFS's instruction. In addition, the CFS will step up the sampling of similar products for testing.

To prevent the import of the COVID-19 virus through imported frozen foods, the CFS has stepped up precautionary testing measures since mid-2020, including enhanced testing of various types of frozen foods and their packaging imported from different countries/regions, which involves taking samples at the Airport Food Inspection Offices and cold stores of importers. Up to now, over 20 000 samples of foods and their packaging were collected for testing for the COVID-19 virus and only the above samples and the pomfret fish and packaging samples announced in August 2021 were found to be positive. The CFS will continue the sampling of imported frozen foods and their packaging for testing. During testing, the products being tested will be held in the cold store. They will be released to the market for sale only if the result is completed and showing a negative result. This would ensure affected products will not be distributed to the market for sale.

The COVID-19 virus is predominantly transmitted through droplets and cannot multiply in food or food packaging. According to current scientific knowledge, the World Health Organization and food safety assessment authorities in overseas countries considered that it is unlikely that the COVID-19 virus can be transmitted to humans via food consumption. Nevertheless, members of the public should always observe personal, food and environmental hygiene. The CFS reminds the public to pay attention to the

following:

- * Always keep hands clean, particularly before touching the mouth, nose or eyes;
- * Rub hands with liquid soap for at least 20 seconds when washing before and after handling chilled and frozen food and its packaging, if any; after going to the toilet; and before eating;
- * Handle raw and cooked food separately, and pay special attention when handling raw meat and offal, to avoid cross-contamination of food; and
- * Cook food thoroughly and avoid consuming raw or undercooked animal products.