

Update on suspected food poisoning cases involving sandwiches

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health today (May 28) provided an update on its investigation into the suspected food poisoning cases involving sandwiches announced since May 21, and reminded the public to maintain personal, food and environmental hygiene to prevent food-borne diseases.

The CHP has today identified seven more clusters of suspected food poisoning related to those sandwiches. Epidemiological investigations show that all of the additional clusters purchased the sandwiches concerned before investigation and preventive and control measures instituted by the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) and the CHP has alerted the FEHD to the additional clusters. The newly reported clusters involved four males and 10 females aged 8 to 49. They developed gastroenteritis symptoms including abdominal pain, vomiting, diarrhoea and fever about five to 50 hours after consuming the sandwiches. Among them, 11 sought medical consultation and one required hospitalisation.

As of 4pm today, the CHP has identified a total of 96 clusters of suspected food poisonings affecting 229 persons. Among them, stool specimens of 12 affected persons and one food remnant sample tested positive for Group D Salmonella.

All affected persons are now in stable condition. Investigations are proceeding.

"Prolonged storage of food at room temperature may allow pathogens to grow and produce toxins. Members of the public should avoid consuming cooked or ready-to-eat food that has been kept at room temperature for several hours," the spokesman said.

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

- Patronise only reliable and licensed restaurants;
- Avoid eating raw seafood;
- Be a discerning consumer in choosing cold dishes, including sashimi, sushi and raw oysters, at a buffet;
- Ensure food is thoroughly cooked before eating during a hot pot 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 food;
- Do not patronise illegal food hawkers;
- Drink boiled water;
- Do not try to use salt, vinegar, wine and wasabi to kill bacteria as they

are not effective; and

- Always wash hands before eating and after going to the toilet.