

Update of investigation into food poisoning incident at Singapore Sports School

1. The Ministry of Health (MOH), National Environment Agency (NEA) and Agri-Food and Veterinary Authority (AVA) have concluded investigations into a food poisoning incident reported at the Singapore Sports School (SSP) on 4 November 2010, involving a licensed caterer, ISS Catering Services Pte Ltd. The incident involved 106 cases, including 11 who needed outpatient treatment. All patients have since recovered.

2. Our investigations showed a common source outbreak of gastroenteritis consistent with bacterial food poisoning. While the exact cause of food poisoning could not be established without positive patient samples, we have identified cordial drinks and chicken frank rolls as the suspected cause of the incident.

3 Our investigations showed that the cordial drinks served to students were prepared by ISS Catering Services Pte Ltd at the school using a plastic bucket which was not clearly labelled. Clear labelling of containers used for food preparation is important to minimise the risks of cross-contamination. One of the food handlers in ISS Catering Services Pte Ltd at Singapore Sports School was also tested positive for Salmonella. MOH has required the food handler to stop working from the time of the outbreak until she was certified fit on 7 Dec 2010.

4 A joint investigation at Wei Cian Foods Pte Ltd (where the chicken frank rolls were produced) was also conducted. The food handlers there tested negative for foodborne pathogens although one food handler was observed to handle ready-to-eat food with his bare hands. Of the six food samples taken from Wei Cian Foods Pte Ltd, only one chicken frank roll sample was detected with 10 cfu/g of *Bacillus cereus*. This bacteria may cause food poisoning if bacteria levels reaches a level > 100,000cfu/g and produces enterotoxin. However, the low level of *Bacillus cereus* detected in the sample was not significant to be the cause of food poisoning and *Bacillus cereus* enterotoxin was not detected.

Actions by AVA

7 Wei Cian Foods Pte Ltd has no past history of violation of food safety requirements. Nevertheless, AVA has reminded Wei Cian Foods Pte Ltd to ensure that all their workers observe good manufacturing and food handling practices.

8 AVA officers routinely inspect all AVA-licensed food establishments to ensure that good manufacturing practices and personal hygiene practices are observed by the food handlers. AVA also provides training workshops for food handlers and emphasises the importance of food safety and personal hygiene during regular inspections of the establishments.

Actions by NEA

9 Following the food poisoning incident, ISS Catering Services Pte Ltd's licence for the SSP canteen has been suspended since 11 November 2010. NEA has noted SSP's decision to award the canteen operating contract to a new operator with effect from 1 January 2011. The license for ISS Catering Services Pte Ltd to operate in the canteen will therefore lapse when the new operator takes over. The SSP canteen is closed and not in operation during this period until school reopens next year.

10 In the interest of public health, NEA has instructed ISS Catering Services Pte Ltd to review their systems and practices for all their other 28 food outlets such as canteens, snack bars and restaurants, and ensure that the following new requirements are in place:

- a) A good system to promote and maintain high standards of personal hygiene of their personnel at all times;
- b) A good system to ensure that food handlers who are sick do not work;
- c) Tighter supervision of processes including food preparation, storage, handling, transportation;
- d) A good system of monitoring the hygienic quality of all ready-to-eat food served at the food outlets, including those obtained from external suppliers

11 ISS-CDCS Catering Pte Ltd, a sister company of ISS Catering Services Pte Ltd, will also be conducting a similar review of the food outlets it is servicing.

12 As food poisoning can take place any time if there is a lapse in personal hygiene, NEA would like to reiterate the importance of all stakeholders in maintaining high standards of personal hygiene at all times. The public is also advised to engage only licensed caterers.

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