

19 September 2008

Dear doctors,

Melamine contaminated milk products

Earlier this month, there were Mainland media reports saying that melamine was found in the infant formula produced by the Mainland's Sanlu brand and there were infants in the Mainland who had consumed Sanlu infant formula suffering from kidney stones and kidney failure, conditions which are rare in infants. On 16 September 2008, the General Administration for Quality Supervision, Inspection and Quarantine announced that melamine was detected in the milk powder of 22 corporations.

Melamine is an industrial chemical used in laminates, glues, adhesives, and should not be present in food products. Excessive exposure to melamine has been found to cause urinary stones, crystalluria and epithelial hyperplasia of urinary bladder in experimental animals. Laboratory studies showed that melamine did not damage genetic materials in cells and there was inadequate evidence to show that melamine can cause human cancers.

The Centre for Food Safety (CFS) has been closely monitoring the incident and has inspected local retail outlets and collected dairy product samples for tests. We found that neither Sanlu infant formula nor other Mainland brands of milk powder was available in the local market. For other milk and milk products, as of 18 September 2008, a total of nine samples were tested to contain amount of melamine with levels ranging from 2.2 mg/kg to 21 mg/kg. Among them, a milk beverage (伊利高鈣低脂奶類飲品) contains melamine at 9.9 mg/kg. This type of milk is not usually recommended for children of less than two years of age. Risk assessment indicated that consumption of about two cups of such milk every day by a two-year old child with average body weight of 9 kg may reach the tolerable daily intake of the chemical. However, the risk is considered to be low. Moreover, occasional excursion above tolerable daily intake may not produce adverse health effects if the average exposure over a prolonged period does not exceed the limit. For other samples, risk is low upon normal consumption.

We appeal to you to provide health advice to the public, together with us, on the incident. Results of samples tested and other information on melamine in milk products are available in the website of CFS (www.cfs.gov.hk). We also appeal to you to report to the Centre for Health Protection of the Department of Health any child presenting with renal diseases including urinary calculi and with history of exposure to melamine containing dairy products via fax (2477 2770), phone (2477 2772) or CENO On-line (www.chp.gov.hk/ceno).

Thank you in advance for your kind support.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'YY Ho', written in a cursive style.

(Dr YY Ho)
for Controller, Centre for Food Safety