

24 September 2008

Dear Doctors,

**Update on Recent Melamine-tainted Milk / Milk Products Incidents
and Its Regulation**

On 19 September 2008, the Centre for Food Safety (CFS) issued a letter to doctors regarding the incidents of melamine-tainted milk / milk products. We would like to update you with the latest development of the incidents, in particular on the legislation to prohibit inappropriate level of melamine in food and the rationale behind.

Since the incidents unfolded, the CFS has taken a number of active steps to control the situation. We have collected a wide range of samples, including milk powder, milk, dairy products and products with milk / milk powder as ingredients for testing (e.g. cakes, chocolates). We will continue to expand the scope of the surveillance and testing in a systematic manner. As of 24 September 2008, of the 443 samples tested, 13 samples (2.9%) were found to contain melamine with levels ranging from 1.4 mg/kg to 21 mg/kg. Comparing with the levels of melamine detected in milk powder samples in the Mainland (up to 2563 mg/kg), the levels detected locally were relatively low. All the failed samples have been removed from shelves.

To better protect public health, the Administration made an emergency amendment to the Harmful Substances in Food Regulation (CAP. 132AF). The following standards came into force on 23 September 2008:

- 1 mg/kg for milk, any food intended to be consumed principally by children under the age of 36 months and those by pregnant or lactating women; and
- 2.5 mg/kg for other food.

In the standard-setting process, the Administration has taken a number of factors into consideration, including the toxicity of melamine, the relevant tolerable daily intakes (TDI), and the possible presence of melamine in food as a result of migration from melamine-containing utensils/packaging during food processing and environmental contamination. The regulatory standards for melamine were set making reference to the TDI of 0.63 mg/kg bw/day established by the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA). Based on the Mainland experience, an additional safety factor was introduced to protect the most vulnerable group i.e. infants and young children at three years old or below. As such, the TDI was lowered to 0.32 mg/kg bw/day for young children. Using this TDI, a child who consumes a cup (250 ml) of milk/milk product containing 10 mg/kg (10 ppm) melamine on a daily basis would reach its TDI. The daily consumption required to reach the TDI would be lower if the level of contaminated melamine is higher. According to the World Health Organization, over 99% of the victims who developed renal disease in the Mainland were below the age of three. Most of them have history of consuming melamine contaminated milk for a period of 3-6 months. Based on the above information, food containing melamine at level below our set regulatory standards is deemed to be safe for consumption. We will closely monitor the latest epidemiological findings in the Mainland.

We understand that many parents are worried about the health of their children, but there is no cause for undue alarm. We appeal to you again to join hands with us in providing health advice to the public. The results of all test samples including photographs of the samples are available on the CFS website www.cfs.gov.hk. Useful information can also be found from the websites of the Centre for Health Protection (www.chp.gov.hk/) and the World Health Organization (www.who.int/foodsafety/en/). For enquiries, members of the public can also call our enquiry number 2381 6096 which operates from 9 am to 9 pm daily.

We will keep you posted when new information comes to light. In this connection, we invite you to join our Food Safety Electronic Information System (FSEIDS). Through this system, we shall send updated information via email/fax to you, including food alerts, monthly e-publication etc. If you are interested, kindly complete the attached reply slip and return it to us.

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