

## Legislative amendment banning the use of melamine in food

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The Secretary for Food and Health, Dr York Chow, today (September 22) announced that the Government would publish in gazette tomorrow the Harmful Substances in Food (Amendment) Regulation 2008 to prohibit the use of melamine in food.

The amendment regulation, which will take effect on the same day of gazettal, aims to ensure that melamine will not be used in food.

Taking into account the possibility that traces of melamine may be present in food due to migration of melamine during food processing and environmental contamination, the Government proposes to set the maximum concentration limit of melamine for milk as well as food intended to be consumed by children under the age of 36 months, pregnant and lactating women at one milligram per kilogram of food.

For other food, the maximum concentration limit will be set at 2.5 milligram per kilogram of food.

Speaking on the legislative amendment at a press conference, Dr Chow said: "The Government has taken reference of the standards of the European Union and the United States in setting the limit. The proposed levels are more stringent than the standards set by European countries and the United States and would serve to protect the health of babies, children and the public."

Any person who imports, consigns, delivers, manufactures or sells for human consumption any food containing greater concentration of the substances stipulated in the law commits an offence. Offenders are subject to a maximum fine of \$50,000 and imprisonment of six months.

"The Government is deeply concerned about the melamine incident. We understand the worries of the public, particularly parents, in children consuming dairy products of the affected brands.

"We therefore decide to amend the law to prohibit inappropriate level of melamine in food to ensure food safety and protect public health," Dr Chow said.

He said the Food and Health Bureau and the Centre for Food Safety (CFS) would continue to closely monitor the situation and take appropriate actions to protect public health. The CFS would maintain close contacts with Mainland authorities and the local trade to ensure stable supply.

From a broader perspective, Dr Chow said the Government would speed up legislating laws on import ban and food recall to strengthen the Government's legal basis and perfect the law in this aspect. This could further help prevent, in a timely manner, problematic food from entering the market.

"The Government has decided to handle legislation on import ban and food recall first and separate it from the Food Safety Bill. We are now studying the most feasible and the quickest way," he said.

On health services, the Hospital Authority (HA) has set up 18 designated general outpatient clinics (GOPC) and seven special assessment centres (including Princess Margaret Hospital) which will commence operation tomorrow.

The 18 clinics will provide free assessment to eligible persons under the age of 12 and have consumed the milk products in question and have relevant symptoms. If necessary, patients will be referred to the special assessment centres of respective clusters to provide further assessment and treatment.

Initially the opening hours of the clinics will cover Saturdays and Sundays for the convenience of parents. As there is a limited service quota at every GOPC and special assessment centre, priority will be given to patients with urgent needs, especially younger and high-risk children, to ensure appropriate assessment and treatment as early as possible.

The opening hours and scope of service are subject to review depending on service demand.

The Centre for Health Protection has set up a hotline 2125 1133, which is operated from 9 am to 5 pm daily, to provide health advice to the public. Members of the public can also call the CFS's enquiry number 2381 6096, which operates from 9 am to 9 pm daily, for related enquiries on milk and milk products.

Melamine is an industrial chemical used in laminates, glues, adhesives, and should not be present in food products.

Ends/Monday, September 22, 2008