

Voluntary Report – Voluntary - Public Distribution

Date: November 25,2019

Report Number: HK2019-0067

Report Name: Hong Kong Suspends Romaine Lettuce Products from Salinas of California

Country: Hong Kong

Post: Hong Kong

Report Category: Vegetables, Sanitary/Phytopsanitary/Food Safety

Prepared By:

Approved By: Alicia Hernandez

Report Highlights:

The Hong Kong government suspended the import and sale of U.S. romaine lettuce in any form (lettuce head, salad mix, etc.) from Salinas, California effective November 23, 2019.

Following The Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) and the Food and Drug Administration's (FDA) announcement about the possible contamination of romaine lettuce from Salinas, California with E.coli 0157:H7, the Hong Kong government (HKG) notified the U.S. Consulate that it had suspended imports of romaine lettuce from Salinas effective November 23, 2019. Presently, an importer has been identified to have imported the products in question. The importer has initiated a voluntary recall.

Back in April 2018 and November 2019, the HKG banned the import and sale of romaine lettuce from Arizona and California, respectively, because these products were associated with an E.coli outbreak. The ban on romaine lettuce products from California was lifted in February 2019 and in March 2019 for products from Arizona after the Agricultural Trade Office's submission of detailed FDA investigation reports.

Below is the HKG's press release dated November 23, 2019 on the latest ban on romaine lettuce from Salinas.

Import and sale of romaine lettuce produced in Salinas, California, US suspended

The Centre for Food Safety (CFS) of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department announced today (November 23) that the import into and sale in Hong Kong of romaine lettuce produced in Salinas, California, the United States (US), has been suspended with immediate effect, as the product might have been contaminated with Escherichia coli (E. coli) O157:H7. The CFS urged the trade to stop using and selling the product concerned immediately should they possess it.

A spokesman for the CFS said, "The Centre, through its Food Incident Surveillance System, noted a notice from the US Food and Drug Administration about the investigation of an outbreak of E. coli infections that was likely linked to the consumption of romaine lettuce produced in Salinas, California, which was suspected to be contaminated with E. coli O157:H7. For the sake of prudence, the CFS has immediately suspended the import into and sale within Hong Kong of romaine lettuce produced in the area concerned."

The spokesman said that CFS preliminary investigations found that a supplier, Wing Kee Product Ltd, had sold a kind of prepackaged salad mix that contained the romaine lettuce concerned. The retailer concerned removed from shelves, stopped sale of the affected product and initiated a recall according to CFS' instructions. Enquiries about the recall can be made to the hotline at 2299 1133 during office hours.

Product details are as follows:

Product name: baby spring mix

Brand: organicgirl

Place of origin: Salinas, California, US

Net weight: 5 ounces /142 grams

The spokesman urged consumers not to consume the abovementioned affected product if they have bought any. The trade should also stop using or selling the product concerned immediately if they possess it.

The spokesman said that the CFS would also enhance surveillance of romaine lettuce produced in the US at import and retail levels.

People will contract E. coli causing gastro-intestinal disease through consumption of contaminated water or undercooked and contaminated foods. Intestinal bleeding and serious complications such as hemolytic uraemic syndrome may also develop in some people. Moreover, due to poor personal hygiene, person-to-person transmission of this pathogen is possible through the oral-faecal route. E. coli cannot survive under high temperature and can be killed by thorough cooking.

The CFS has informed the US authorities concerned of the import suspension and alerted the trade to the incident. The Centre will continue to follow up on the incident and take appropriate action. Investigation is on-going.

Ends/Saturday, November 23, 2019

Issued at HKT 22:57

Attachments:

No Attachments.