

Voluntary Report – Voluntary - Public Distribution

Date: October 25, 2021

Report Number: HK2021-0050

Report Name: COVID-19 Testing of Imported Foods and their Packaging

Country: Hong Kong

Post: Hong Kong

Report Category: Agricultural Situation, Agriculture in the Economy, Agriculture in the News

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Report Highlights:

Seeking to prevent the spread of COVID-19 virus through imported foods, the Hong Kong government has been testing chilled and frozen foods and their packaging. After one year of monitoring, Hong Kong disposed of three shipments following detections of COVID-19.

Following reports on China's finding of COVID-19 virus-contamination in imported frozen foods or their packaging in mid-2020, Hong Kong started testing various types of cold chain food imports and their packaging at the point of entry, from different countries/regions. Samples are taken at airport and importer's cold warehouses/storage units.

As of the end of 2020, Hong Kong authorities collected over 1,300 food samples for testing. Another 3,400 samples were taken between January and February 2021. In early August of this year, the Hong Kong government reported the first finding of a contaminated shipment. This finding prompted total tested samples to jump to 14,000, all tests yielding negative results.

On August 10, the Centre for Food Safety (CFS) collected ten pomfret fish surface samples and packaging samples from a batch of ten boxes of chilled pomfret fish (around 270 kg in total) imported by air from Indonesia. Two pomfret fish surface samples and one packaging sample were found to be positive with the COVID-19 virus, although the viral load was low.

When the test results became available, the shipment in question was distributed to five retailers through two wholesale markets. This incident led to the thorough disinfection of the affected sites, epidemiological assessment of individuals who had come into contact with the concerned shipment, and quarantine or compulsory testing requirements of individuals concerned as appropriate.

To minimize traceability efforts and the impact on the community in the event any shipment is confirmed to be contaminated, the CFS has now adopted a hold and test policy whereby shipments are not allowed to be released until the test results are available. The CFS is conscious that importers must pay storage cost if shipments stay at the airport beyond 24 hours. Normally, test results are available within 24 hours. Exceptions occur only when preliminary test results are inconclusive.

The CFS confirmed that up until mid-October 2021, only three Indonesian shipments were found contaminated with COVID-19 and the shipments were disposed with full cooperation of the importers. Hong Kong's sampling plan for COVID testing also considers intelligence and findings in supplier markets.

Attachments:

No Attachments.