

CONTROLLING OFFICER'S REPLY**FHB(FE)131****(Question Serial No. 1353)**Head: (49) Food and Environmental Hygiene DepartmentSubhead (No. & title): (-) Not specifiedProgramme: (1) Food Safety and Public HealthControlling Officer: Director of Food and Environmental Hygiene (Miss Diane WONG)Director of Bureau: Secretary for Food and HealthQuestion:

- A) Please provide details of the staff establishment, salary points of staff members and number of staff vacancies of the authority responsible for testing imported food.
- B) How many testing and examination facilities are there? Is it necessary to purchase new machinery to cope with the COVID-19 epidemic situation?
- C) How many COVID-19 tests are conducted on imported foods? What percentage of imported food products is tested? Based on the experience of other countries and regions, what has been done to prevent the importation of the COVID-19 virus through the cold chain? Is this sufficient to prevent the importation of the virus into Hong Kong via this pathway?

Asked by: Hon LAM Kin-fung, Jeffrey (LegCo internal reference no.: 48)Reply:

- (A) & (B) A portion of imported food samples collected by the Centre for Food Safety (CFS) of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) will undergo chemical testing by the Man Kam To Food Laboratory under the CFS. The Government Laboratory and the Public Health Laboratory Services Branch of the Department of Health (DH) will also be commissioned to perform tests on samples as necessitated by the items to be tested.

The food laboratory under the FEHD is staffed by 19 civil servants. There is currently no vacancy. Details of its staff establishment and the salary points of the staff are set out below:

Post titles of food laboratory staff	Counts	Salary points (Master Pay Scale)
Senior Chemist	1	45-49
Chemist	2	27-44

Post titles of food laboratory staff	Counts	Salary points (Master Pay Scale)
Science Laboratory Technologist	1	29-33
Science Laboratory Technician I	6	22-28
Science Laboratory Technician II	6	8-21
Laboratory Attendant	2	5-8
Assistant Clerical Officer	1	3-15
Total:	19	

Regarding COVID-19 testing on imported frozen foods and their packaging by the CFS, all samples are tested by the Public Health Laboratory Services Branch of the DH. No resources of the food laboratory of the FEHD are involved in this aspect of work.

- (C) The CFS has been collecting samples of various types of frozen foods and their packaging at the import level for COVID-19 testing since mid-2020. As at late March 2021, over 6 000 relevant samples of food (mainly seafood and meat) imported from 50 places have been collected for testing. The results were all negative. We do not keep statistics on the share of different imported frozen foods sampled for testing. The CFS will continue to take samples of imported frozen foods and their packaging to closely monitor the risk of virus transmission via frozen food imports.

Moreover, to enhance monitoring of the risks in handling frozen foods, the FEHD has arranged free COVID-19 testing for practitioners of licensed cold stores on an ongoing basis since November 2020. As at late March 2021, over 5 800 samples have been tested. The test results were all negative. The FEHD will continue to provide testing services for practitioners of licensed cold stores. Persons who have undergone the tests are also entitled for retesting.

To further prevent the risk of contracting the virus in cold stores, the CFS initiated discussions with cold store operators on stepping up of disinfection of the outer package of imported frozen foods and the working environment of cold stores in November 2020. In December 2020, the CFS issued guidelines to licensed cold stores advising on preventive measures, including disinfection methods and personal protection, etc. The FEHD will continue to work with the frozen food trade to enhance the anti-epidemic work with regard to imported frozen foods.

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