

JOINT MEDIA RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

NEA AND AVA REMIND FOOD OPERATORS TO REMAIN VIGILANT AND ENSURE GOOD FOOD HYGIENE PRACTICES DURING THE UPCOMING FESTIVE SEASON

Consumers also advised to practise good food hygiene

Singapore, 03 December 2018 – Food safety is a joint responsibility. The National Environment Agency (NEA) and the Agri-Food & Veterinary Authority of Singapore (AVA) will be stepping up checks on food establishments during the festive season. In addition, NEA and AVA advise all food operators and consumers to practise good food and personal hygiene, especially as we approach the year-end festive season. Safe preparation and handling of food will help minimise the risk of food poisoning incidents.

Consumers have a part to play

2 Consumers play an important part in ensuring food safety. Consumers should take personal responsibility, be aware of and adopt good food safety practices in daily life. Some simple tips include:

(i) Select food carefully

Food safety begins when we do our shopping. Food in damaged packaging can be contaminated by micro-organisms. Similarly, food safety and quality may be compromised if the food has expired or has turned mouldy. Exercising care in food selection can reduce the risk of food poisoning.

(ii) Separate raw and cooked food

Raw food should be handled and consumed with care. It can contain dangerous micro-organisms, which can cause foodborne diseases. When raw food is mixed with cooked food, juices from the raw meat or seafood with micro-organisms may be transferred to the cooked form, also known as cross contamination. As a general precaution, young children, pregnant women, the elderly and immune-compromised persons should avoid eating raw or uncooked food.

(iii) Keep food at right temperatures

When storing food, consumers should ensure that food are not kept longer than the recommended shelf life. Food should also be stored at the right temperatures. Harmful bacteria grow quickly at ambient room temperatures, so it is always good to keep cold foods cold, and hot foods hot, especially if there is a prolonged waiting period from the time the food is cooked until it is consumed¹.

¹ Food-borne pathogenic bacteria multiply quickly between 5°C and 60°C. If a cooked food item is contaminated with bacteria, for example, as a result of cross-contamination or poor hand hygiene practices, keeping that contaminated food item at such ambient temperatures (between 5°C and 60°C) could result in the bacteria multiplying to reach sufficient levels that could cause food poisoning when the food item is consumed.

(iv) Wash and keep clean

Consumers can prevent food from becoming contaminated simply by washing and keeping our hands, food and environment clean. This include good kitchen and personal hygiene practices. Common serving spoons should be used when sharing food, and hands should be washed thoroughly with soap and water before eating.

(v) Cook food well

Thorough cooking helps to kill the harmful bacteria in food. Consumers should take note of food that require more effort in cooking well, such as meat patties where meat becomes more exposed to bacteria in the process of mincing, barbequed meat, whole poultry and seafood.

3 For catered food, consumers should ensure that food is consumed within the stipulated 'consume by' time period. Every catered meal carries an inherent risk as the food is not consumed immediately after it is prepared. Catering operations involve advance preparation of large quantities of food for consumption at a later time. NEA has made it mandatory for caterers to adopt a Food Safety Management System, to ensure that good practices are observed in the preparation of the meals. To further reduce the risk, caterers are required to time-stamp the meals to inform consumers of the recommended 'consume by' time, which is set at four hours from the time a cooked dish is placed at the temperature danger zone of between 5°C and 60°C. Consumers should also engage only licensed caterers. A list of licensed caterers is available on NEA's website at <https://www.nea.gov.sg/docs/default-source/our-services/food-hygiene/list-of-eating-estab-track-record-caterers.pdf>

4 For more food safety tips, refer to the Annex and visit NEA and AVA's websites at www.nea.gov.sg/docs/default-source/our-services/guidelines-for-eating-safely-during-festive-season.pdf and bit.ly/AVAFoodsafetypractices respectively.

Working with the industry to uphold food hygiene standards

5 With the increase in volume of consumers dining out and ordering catered food during the upcoming festive season, it is important for all food operators to ensure that the food sold is prepared hygienically and safe for consumption. NEA and AVA will be issuing our regular year-end advisories to food operators to remind them to adhere to good hygiene practices during food preparation and handling. Operators of food retail establishments are advised to ensure that all their food handlers have attended the requisite basic hygiene training and are registered with NEA, and that they do not engage in any food preparation if they are sick.

6 This year, NEA is also engaging key representatives from the Association of Catering Professionals Singapore (ACAPS) and the Restaurant Association of Singapore (RAS) about the importance of food hygiene and safety. These associations represent caterers and restaurants which provide catering services, and they have committed to issuing similar reminders to their members. NEA and AVA will also be conducting similar briefings to other major food service operators during this festive period.

7 In addition, NEA and AVA will be prioritising their inspections to focus on the licensees that provide catering services and other premises with substantial catering operations during this festive period. During the inspections, our officers will provide advisory guidance and remind licensees and food handlers on proper food and personal hygiene practices. Food operators are reminded to have adequate capacity and maintain a proper system to handle the orders that they take on during this festive period, including for take-out services, to ensure that food hygiene and public health are not compromised.

Efforts in safeguarding public health

8 This year, as at end November, NEA has conducted more than 73,000 inspections on food retail establishments, taken more than 2,600 enforcement actions against food retail operators who failed to comply with hygiene regulations, and suspended 84 licences. AVA has conducted more than 9,000 inspections on food manufacturers, taken close to 500 enforcement actions against licensees who failed to comply with our regulations, and suspended 13 licences as of 30 November 2018.

9 During NEA's routine inspections, should any hygiene infringements be observed within the premises, enforcement actions will be taken against the operator of the food retail establishment. NEA will also require the licensee to rectify the hygiene lapses. For premises with repeated offences or serious offences resulting in suspension, all their food handlers would also be required to re-attend and pass the Basic Food Hygiene course before they can resume work. We would like to advise consumers who come across poor hygiene practices in food establishments not to patronise such outlets and to call our 24-hour NEA Call Centre at 1800 - CALL NEA (1800 - 2255632) with details for our follow-up investigations.

10 Similarly during AVA's routine inspections, enforcement actions are taken against lapses and operators are required to rectify the non-conformance. AVA will not hesitate to suspend food establishments which pose a serious threat to public health, such as where there are pest infestations. Both NEA and AVA also conduct annual grading inspections at the food establishments, to perform a thorough systems audit of the operators' processes.

11 To further safeguard public health, we will continue to review the overall framework, including the current penalty regime, to strengthen accountability of operators and ensure that food establishments take greater responsibility for the hygiene standards of their premises and operational processes. This will be part of the efforts to enhance regulatory oversight over all food related matters and further strengthen our food safety regime.

Minimising food wastage

12 To save resources and protect the environment, consumers and food businesses can take active steps to minimise the amount of food wasted, especially during the upcoming festive season. Consumers can play an active role in reducing food wastage by buying, ordering and cooking only what one needs. Consumers can refer to an online guide, which provides useful tips on how to reduce food wastage at home, when eating out and when planning for events, at www.cgs.sg/fwrguide. Food businesses such as food retail establishments and caterers can also do their part by offering different portion sizes for consumers and engaging consumers to reduce food wastage. Together with AVA, NEA has developed food waste minimisation guidebooks, which assist food businesses to develop food waste minimisation plan to reduce their food waste and provide tips on engaging customers to reduce food wastage. The guidebooks can be downloaded from www.nea.gov.sg/food-waste-management.

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About National Environment Agency

Formed on 1 July 2002, the National Environment Agency (NEA) is the leading public organisation responsible for ensuring a clean and green environment, and the sustainable development of Singapore. Its key roles are to protect Singapore's resources from pollution, maintain a high level of public health and provide timely meteorological information. NEA also develops and spearheads environmental initiatives and programmes through its partnership with the People, Public and Private sectors. It is committed to motivating every individual to care for the environment as a way of life, in order to sustain a quality living environment for present and future generations.

About Agri-Food & Veterinary Authority

The Agri-Food & Veterinary Authority (AVA) of Singapore is responsible for ensuring a resilient supply of safe food, safeguarding health and welfare of animals, safeguarding the health of plants, and facilitating agri-trade.

Food safety tips on preparing and consuming food

Practise Good Personal Hygiene



Wash hands thoroughly with soap and water, especially before food preparation and after visiting the toilet.

Keep Food Preparation Areas Clean



Keep food preparation surfaces and equipment clean.



Dispose all refuse into plastic garbage bags.

Handle Food Safely



Use separate chopping boards, crockery and utensils for raw and cooked/ready-to-eat food.



Provide common serving utensils when sharing food.

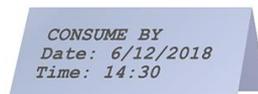


Store cooked/ready-to-eat food above raw food in the chiller or freezer and ensure that food is properly covered and stored in tight-fitting containers.

Exercise Diligence



Engage only licensed food caterers and ensure catered food is not delivered too early.



Display the time stamp provided by the licensed caterer for everyone to see. Avoid eating catered food after the "consume by" time.



Observe the appearance, texture and smell of food. Do not eat food that has turned 'sour', has a 'bad-taste' or has a foul smell.

Keep Food at Right Temperatures



Keep hot food above 60 degree Celsius and cold food below 5 degree Celsius.

Eat Raw Food with Care



Raw food such as sashimi and oysters may carry harmful bacteria. As a general precaution, young children, pregnant women, elderly or immune-compromised persons should avoid consuming them.

