Ensure your food is safe from unseen germs

“Is my food safe? How can I be a trustworthy food supplier? How can I boost my company’s reputation in public?”

If you have the above questions, ALS HK sincerely presents this newsletter to you.

In Hong Kong, public health and food safety assurance on the pathogenic aspect are safeguarded by Microbiological Guidelines for Food (Revised by Centre for Food Safety, FEHD in August 2014).

The microbiological limits for ready-to-eat food in general consist of three components:

1. **Indicator of quality** – Aerobic colony count (ACC)
2. **Hygiene indicator organisms** – Enterobacteriaceae and *Escherichia coli* (*E. coli*)

**Test results** of the above three components of foods can be classified into three classes:

- ✓ **Satisfactory** – indicating good microbiological quality;
- ≈ **Borderline** – not unsatisfactory but are also not satisfactory. Test results are on the upper limit of acceptability and which indicate the potential for development of public health problems and of unacceptable risk;
- X **Unsatisfactory** – indicating the food is potentially injurious to health and/or unfit for human consumption. Remedial action should be taken.

The microbiological criteria are not only limited for ready-to-eat food, also applied on other specific food items, such as bottled water, edible ice, non-bottled drinks, powdered formulae for infants and young children, treated/ready-to-eat spices and live or raw bivalve molluscs intended for direct consumption.

**“Where can I test my food in order to gain confidence from my consumers?”**

ALS HK can certainly help you providing tailored made test packages for various food categories. Most of the popular tests are even HOKLAS accredited to assure the precision of test results. Details of our accredited test scope, you may refer to HOKLAS website: [https://www.itc.gov.hk/en/quality/hkas/doc/scopes/066.pdf](https://www.itc.gov.hk/en/quality/hkas/doc/scopes/066.pdf)

**“Do I need to test all Hygiene Indicators and Foodborne Pathogens on my food?”**

Absolutely No. ALS HK will suggest tailor made test package depend on the food category and the risk associated. Below are the examples:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Food Category</th>
<th>Examples</th>
<th>Suggested test items (performed by ALS HK)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9. Raw ready-to-eat meat and fish, cold smoked fish</td>
<td>Sushi, Sashimi, Smoked Salmon</td>
<td>Aerobic colony count* Escherichia coli* Enterobacteriaceae Staphylococcus aureus* Salmonella spp.*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Cooked meat products that may be displayed for sale at ambient temperature for a limited period of time</td>
<td>Siu-Mei, Lo-Mei</td>
<td>Aerobic colony count* Escherichia coli* Enterobacteriaceae Staphylococcus aureus*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Remarks:** * denoted that ALS HK laboratory is HOKLAS accredited for the method.
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Do you know?

**Various Aerobic Colony Count (ACC) levels depending on food categories**
Based on the raw ingredients used, the nature and degree of processing before sale, various ready-to-eat foods are categorized into 14 food categories. Each food category has own criteria for Aerobic Colony Count (ACC) level.

**Hygiene Indicator Organism**
Hygiene Indicator Organism (Enterobacteriaceae and *Escherichia coli*) aims to reflect the hygienic quality of food, except for food that contains fresh fruit and vegetables and cheese made from raw milk.

**Why more than 100g sample is needed for E. coli test on Raw Oyster for direct consumption?**
It is because the criteria for *E. coli* test is 700 MPN/100g, then 100g of oyster meat must be tested. Don’t forget that only edible part can be tested. Oyster Shell is excluded from the sample size. *Salmonella* species test is requested for raw oyster too and additional 25 gram of oyster meat is needed.

**Shelf life tests available**
ALS HK can offer testing of your food on the production date (P+0) and your designed dates, such as 4 days after production (P+4), 90 days after production (P+90) etc. Food can be kept in different temperatures during whole storage period. It is an authentic way to know how long you can sell your food for!

**Why there is * in my result of ALS HK report? Pass or Fail?**
Result marked with “*” denotes an estimated count which based on a count outside of standard method’s countable range. Not relative to Pass or Fail. Upon your request, FEHD Acceptable Limits and/or conclusion of compliance can be added on your report to assist you to judge the food hygiene level and take further follow up action timely.

**What should I do if my ready-to-eat food is not belonged to any one of the 14 food categories?**
The microbiological guideline does not cover all food types, but food owners ensure the hygienic safety of food before sold. Contact ALS HK for professional consultation, we will evaluate the risks of microbiological hazards and suggest the most appropriate tests to evaluate the hygienic level of your products.

**Need it urgently?**
No worries. Standard turnaround time is 7 working days. Priority and Urgent service of 3 working days can also be arranged subject to availability.

**Contact Us**
Please contact our Food CS team, we will sort it out for you!
Tel: (852) 2610 1044  email: FoodCS.hk@alsglobal.com

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