

# Flavoured drinks, chicken sausage rolls may have caused food poisoning at Sports School

SINGAPORE — Flavoured drinks and chicken sausage rolls are suspected to have caused the mass food poisoning incident at the Singapore Sports School canteen last month, according to investigations by the authorities.

The probe on the incident, which affected 106 students, was carried out by the Ministry of Health, the National Environment Agency (NEA) and the Agri-Food and Veterinary Authority (AVA).

In a joint-statement yesterday, the three agencies said they could not determine the exact cause of the Nov 4 incident in the absence of positive patient samples.

Their investigations showed that the flavoured drinks prepared by canteen operator ISS Catering Services were served to students

using a plastic bucket which was not clearly labelled.

The agencies said clear labelling was important to minimise the risks of cross-contamination.

One of the food handlers also tested positive for salmonella. She stopped work immediately until she was certified fit on Dec 7.

The manufacturer of the chicken sausage rolls, Wei Cian Foods, was also investigated and its food handlers tested negative for food-borne bacteria although one food handler was seen handling ready-to-eat food with his bare hands.

Six chicken sausage roll samples were taken and only one had some bacteria on it.

But the bacteria level was not high enough to cause food poisoning.

## ISS 'DEEPLY REGRETS' INCIDENT

The AVA has reminded Wei Cian Foods to observe good manufacturing and food handling practices.

ISS Catering Services, whose licence to operate the Sports School canteen had been suspended since Nov 11, will no longer operate the canteen from January. The school has decided to award the operating contract to a new operator, which will be named soon.

In a statement, the Singapore Sports School said ISS Catering Services had offered compensation for the medical expenses incurred by affected staff and students. SSS

principal Deborah Tan said it would also appoint an independent food hygiene assessor.

The incident marks the fourth time that ISS Catering Services, which had been running the school's canteen since January 2008, had flouted hygiene rules.

In April, it was fined \$500 and given six demerit points for having dirty premises and poor rubbish management procedures at the school. It was also involved in two earlier food poisoning cases there.

The NEA has instructed ISS Catering Services to review their systems and practices for all their other 28 food outlets. ISS-CDSC Catering, a sister company, will also be conducting a similar review of the food outlets it is servicing.

In a statement, ISS Catering Services said it deeply regretted the incident and that it had taken immediate steps to review its whole supply chain process and practices. It added that the new procedures and guidelines recommended by the consultants would be strictly applied across all its food outlets. Some of these include conducting random audit checks of a supplier's premises and processes and sending random cooked food samples for microbiological tests.

To mitigate the chances of staff testing positive for salmonella, the company said it has taken the initiative to send all its food handlers for a one-time stool culture analysis test and would continue to do so annually.

MUSTAFA SHAFWI