

Likely causes of food poisoning identified

BY SUJIN THOMAS

INVESTIGATIONS into the food-poisoning outbreak at the Singapore Sports School (SSP) last month have identified a cordial drink and chicken-frank rolls as the likely culprits, said a joint-agency statement released yesterday.

The statement from the Ministry of Health (MOH), National Environment Agency (NEA) and the Agri-Food & Veterinary Authority said that the plastic bucket used to contain the cordial drink served to students was not clearly labelled.

The drink was prepared by ISS Catering Services, which has over 20 years of experience in the business.

Its SSP licence was suspended on Nov 11.

The statement said: "Clear labelling of containers used for food preparation is important to minimise the risks of cross-contamination."

A common-source outbreak of gastroenteritis, consistent with bacterial food poisoning, showed up during investigations, although the exact cause of the food poisoning could not be established.

An ISS Catering Services food handler at the school also tested positive for salmonella, commonly associated with food-borne diseases and bacteria from faeces or human skin.

The food handler, who was required by MOH to stop work at the time of the outbreak, was certified fit on Tuesday.

A joint investigation of the Woodlands production line of Wei Cian Foods, where the chicken-frank rolls were produced, was also conducted.

Food handlers there tested negative for food-borne pathogens, although one handler was seen handling ready-to-eat food with his bare hands.

Of the six food samples taken from Wei Cian Foods, only one chicken-frank roll sample was found to contain bacteria, although levels were too low in the sample to be significant as a cause of the food poisoning.

The food supplier has no history of violating food-safety requirements.

The NEA noted the school's decision to award its canteen operating contract to a new operator with effect from Jan 1 next year, said the statement.

The school's canteen is closed until the academic term re-opens next year.

In the interests of public health, the NEA instructed ISS Catering Services to review its systems and practices for all its other 28 food outlets, such as canteens, snack bars and restaurants.

ISS-CDCS Catering, a sister company of ISS Catering Services, will also be conducting a similar review of the food outlets it services.

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