



Press Release

UPDATE ON INVESTIGATIONS INTO FOOD POISONING INCIDENT AT SPIZE RESTAURANT AT RIVER VALLEY ROAD

The National Environment Agency (NEA), the Ministry of Health (MOH), and the Agri-Food & Veterinary Authority of Singapore (AVA) have completed investigations into the food poisoning incident at Spize Restaurant located at River Valley Road.

2. A total of seven food poisoning incidents were found to be linked to Spize Restaurant, involving 82 cases who had consumed food from the restaurant between 6 and 9 November 2018. 47 cases were hospitalised, and one individual had passed away. The cause of death is pending and it has been classified as a coroner's case. The rest of the cases have since recovered. No cases linked to other Spize outlets were reported.

Investigation Findings

3. At a joint inspection conducted by NEA, MOH and AVA on 7 November 2018, several serious hygiene lapses were found. These included leaving ready-to-eat food uncovered in a chiller, not providing soap for hand-washing and slotting knives for preparing ready-to-eat food in the gap between the food preparation tables. In view of the substantial health risk posed, the restaurant's operating licences were suspended following the inspection.

4. A second joint inspection was conducted at the implicated premises on 14 November 2018, and interviews with the licensee and food handlers were held. Several severe irregularities were identified:

- (i) Seven unregistered food handlers were identified;
- (ii) Food was prepared outside the licensed kitchen area; and
- (iii) Poor personal hygiene and food preparation practices of the food handlers.

5. Through laboratory investigation, a commonly occurring bacterium, *Salmonella* Typhimurium, was isolated from the clinical samples of some affected cases, raw and ready-to-eat food, and environmental samples from the implicated premises. All of the *Salmonella* Typhimurium isolates were found to be closely related to each other by genetic analysis, suggesting that they are from the same source. There was also other bacterial contamination found in ready-to-eat food items and surfaces that came into contact with ready-to-eat food.

6. The investigations found that the outbreak of *Salmonella* gastroenteritis was unusually severe, suggesting that the food was likely to be heavily contaminated. There is strong evidence of severe contamination from poor hygiene and food handling practices, and contamination of ready-to-eat food and the environment.

Follow Up Actions

7. NEA takes a very serious view of food hygiene lapses and will not tolerate any violations of food hygiene which might compromise the well-being of the public. Given the egregious nature of the lapses, NEA has terminated the operating licences of Spize Restaurant at River Valley Road with immediate effect. NEA will also be taking enforcement action against the licensee for the lapses.

8. As a precaution, NEA has checked the other outlets under the same chain. Thus far, there is no evidence to link the current outbreak to these other outlets and they have been allowed to continue operations.

9. The NEA and AVA will be stepping up checks on food establishments during the festive season. With the increase in volume of consumers dining out and ordering catered food during the upcoming festive season, all food operators must ensure that the food sold is prepared hygienically and safe for consumption. We will not hesitate to take action against any operator for failing to maintain food safety. 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. 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. We will continue to maintain our strict stance on food safety and ensure compliance from the food operators.

**NATIONAL ENVIRONMENT AGENCY
MINISTRY OF HEALTH
AGRI-FOOD & VETERINARY AUTHORITY OF SINGAPORE
7 DECEMBER 2018**
