

Sota food poisoning: Active ageing centres, schools stop meal distribution

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Active ageing centres and schools that had yet to distribute ready-to-eat (RTE) meals as part of a Total Defence exercise will not proceed with the distribution, after 20 students from School of the Arts (Sota) came down with food poisoning after consuming such meals.

This comes after the authorities suspended the Total Defence food resilience programme until a probe into the Sota food poisoning case is completed.

In a joint Facebook statement on Feb 20, the Singapore Food Agency (SFA), Ministry of Education (MOE), Agency for Integrated Care (AIC) and food solutions provider Sats said SFA and MOE are working

on putting in place further precautionary measures at participating venues, including replacing the ready-to-eat meals produced from the same batch.

Some 150,000 RTE meals, developed by Sats for public consumption during national emergencies, were to be distributed from Feb 15 to 28 as part of 2025 Exercise SG Ready, which aims to strengthen Singapore's food resilience amid simulated power outages.

Sats said in a statement later on Feb 20 that over 100,000 meals have been delivered to more than 200 locations. Of these, 1,475 meals were delivered to Sota, which is collecting back the unconsumed meals. SFA and MOE will also replace the ready-to-eat meals produced from the same batch.

In response to queries from The

Straits Times, MOE said on the evening of Feb 20 that of the 91 schools participating in the food resilience programme, about two-thirds conducted the programme before it was suspended.

It added that affected schools will carry out their Total Defence Day commemoration activities without RTE meals.

Montfort Secondary, one of the schools that halted RTE meal distribution on Feb 20, informed parents in the morning of the move.

The message, sent via MOE communication portal Parents Gateway and seen by ST, said: "We encourage students to bring their own food for recess, and a few school canteen stalls will be open as well."

More than 100,000 students and teachers from over 90 schools and three Institute of Technical Educa-

tion colleges, along with around 8,000 senior citizens, have received or were due to receive the RTE meals.

ST understands that students at Anglo-Chinese School (Independent), Kranji Secondary, Bukit Panjang Government High, Sengkang Secondary, Victoria School, Dunman Secondary and Compassvale Secondary are among those who had received the meals.

In response to ST's queries, AIC said that as at the morning of Feb 20, distribution to all active ageing centres and senior citizens has been halted. Among these were six of 15 active ageing centres under Thye Hua Kwan Moral Charities (THKMC) that were participating in the exercise.

Mr Andy Lee, chief of THK seniors' community services, said these centres are in Chong Pang, Bedok, Beo Crescent, Bukit Merah View, MacPherson and Telok Blangah Crescent. A seventh centre, in Cassia, has not received its RTE meals, he added.

He said 169 meals had been con-

sumed by 105 clients across eight centres by Feb 19. These included THKMC's centres in Kaki Bukit, Taman Jurong and Ang Mo Kio.

There have been no other reported incidents to date, Sats said in its statement.

"We are collaborating with the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Health and the Singapore Food Agency to identify the root cause of these cases," it added.

"A thorough investigation will include an examination of our products, production sites and other consumed items, as well as a consideration of potentially contributory factors such as environmental influences," Sats said.

In their joint statement, the authorities and Sats said early investigations of the Sota case suggest it was an isolated incident.

"None were hospitalised, and teachers have and will continue to check in with students on their well-being," they said.

Sats developed the halal-certified RTE meals, which included curry chicken with briyani rice, fish por-

ridge with sweet potato and pumpkin, and vegetable marinara pasta. The meals were touted as being able to be stored without refrigeration for months and not requiring reheating before consumption.

Sats on Feb 20 told ST that the incident has not disrupted its food production lines, adding that it had no update to its investigations.

It said the RTE meals were produced using advanced techniques similar to those used for Singapore Armed Forces combat rations.

In a Feb 15 report by ST, Sats said the meals have a listed shelf life of eight months if stored in cool, dry conditions, although Ms Jean Sin, head of innovation and product development at Sats, said they can remain edible even after 12 months or more.

Sats said that prior to distribution, the meals were kept in individual sealed boxes, which had been tested for leaks and were stored at room temperature in cool, shaded conditions.

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Summary of news coverage

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