



Persatuan Pengguna Pulau Pinang Consumers Association of Penang

檳城消費人協會 பிளாங்கு பயனீட்டாளர் சங்கம்

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Press Statement

10 May 2019

Ramadhan Bazaars' Food Safety in Question

Consumers' Association of Penang (CAP) calls on the state health department to be vigilant against food poisoning and water-borne diseases that may easily be propagated through unhygienic food handling at all Ramadhan bazaars.

From our surveillance, we found that many food handlers at Ramadhan bazaars did not wear gloves, apron, or headwear. There were often several people manning a stall and we wondered if they have been vaccinated against typhoid and if they had attended the mandatory lectures on food handling.

We have to consider the possibility of the food being stored at room temperature in pots or trays for more than four hours (assuming from 3pm to 7pm) and cross-contamination from the use of the scoops and tongs for different food.

Therefore, it was no surprise that the food samples we collected from a number of stalls before showed contamination by harmful pathogenic bacteria such as *E. coli* and a few having *Salmonella*. We are also concerned over news reports almost every year of the pathogenic bacteria found in random food samples from Ramadhan stalls. These stalls are also located in open areas exposed to dust and attracted flies.

In a study published in 2017, it was found that 42 per cent of samples collected from food outlets in Kelantan had *E. coli*, *Salmonella*, and *Staphylococcus*. It also found the presence of foodborne pathogen in cooked meat products and it suggested the "possibilities of cross contamination and lack of hygiene during food handling".

The areas of concern lie not only in cooked food left at room temperature over a prolonged period but also herbs for ulam, and raw marinated meats used for ayam percik and satay.

We urge Health Ministry authorities and local council to inform the public on the measures being taken to ensure that the food sold at these temporary food stalls are safe for consumption and if these stalls are licensed. Inspections should be conducted nationwide to ensure that these stall operators are in compliance with food laws. Action has to be taken to avert an epidemic outbreak nationwide.

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