

## **Update (2) on Total Defence Day Ambient RTE Meal distribution**

**4 March 2025**

This morning, Grace Fu, Singapore's Minister for Sustainability and the Environment, addressed questions from Members of Parliament regarding the food safety incident at the School of the Arts (SOTA), following Total Defence Day activities where ambient Ready-to-Eat (RTE) meals were served. The minister's response is appended below.

In her response, she informed Parliament that the Singapore Food Agency (SFA) had inspected SATS' premises on 23 January 2025, prior to the start of the Food Resilience Preparedness Programme (FRPP). The premises were found to be clean, and no food safety violations were detected.

Over the past two weeks, our SATS Food Solutions team have collaborated fully with authorities to determine the cause of the gastroenteritis outbreak. We are working with them on a comprehensive review to assess food safety not only within our kitchens, but also at last-mile distribution and the point of consumption. Food sample tests by SFA have not detected any foodborne pathogens in the RTE meals prepared by SATS thus far.

Joint investigations are on-going and SATS remains committed to continue working with the relevant ministries and SFA, to learn from this incident, and to restore confidence in ambient RTEs meals. Lessons learned from this year's FRPP exercise will be used to enhance measures for Singapore's food resilience.

**ORAL REPLY TO PARLIAMENTARY QUESTION ON FOOD SAFETY INCIDENT AT THE SCHOOL OF THE ARTS, 4 MARCH 2025**

1. Mr Speaker, may I have your permission to take Questions 1, 2 and 3 and Written Question 2 in today's Order Paper, as well as a question on the same topic raised by Mr Zhulkarnain Abdul Rahim scheduled for the Sitting on 5 March together. These five PQs relate to the food safety incident at the School of the Arts (SOTA).
2. The Food Resilience Preparedness Programme (FRPP) which involved the distribution of over 100,000 Ready-to-Eat (RTE) meals to secondary schools, pre-universities, Institutes of Technical Education, public agencies, and Active Ageing Centres was part of this year's commemoration of Total Defence Day. The RTE distribution was originally scheduled to take place from 15 February to 28 February.
3. On 19 February 2025, SFA was informed that 20 students at SOTA exhibited symptoms of gastroenteritis after they had consumed RTE meals. Students who needed medical attention sought outpatient medical treatment and have since recovered. None of the students were hospitalised. On 20 February 2025, SFA, together with the Ministry of Education (MOE), Agency for Integrated Care (AIC) and food caterer SATS, decided to pause the FRPP until investigations on the SOTA gastroenteritis cases were concluded. At the same time, we also reached out to other recipient institutions to ascertain if there were other cases of related illness.
4. Joint investigations by the Ministry of Health (MOH) and SFA are ongoing. As of 3 March, the total number of verified cases of gastroenteritis was 187, of which 184 were from schools, 2 were from Active Ageing Centres and 1 from a public agency. This constituted about 0.16% of the participants. All affected individuals have received the necessary medical attention and have since recovered. None were hospitalised. SFA has also collected samples of the meals for testing. The tests did not find any foodborne pathogens. SFA and MOH are conducting a comprehensive investigation of this unfortunate incident, and SFA will take the necessary corrective and enforcement actions if any lapses are detected.
5. Members asked about the processes in place to vet suppliers of RTE meals for Government programmes. SATS, like all SFA licensed establishments, is required to comply with food safety requirements and subjected to food safety inspections. Food safety requirements include ensuring that food preparation areas and process workflows are set up in a way that prevent contamination between raw and cooked food, putting systems in place to ensure cleanliness and freedom from pest infestation, as well as having food workers certified with food safety training.
6. SFA inspected SATS' premises on 23 January 2025, prior to the start of the FRPP. The premises were found to be clean, and no food safety violations were detected. SATS had also put in place additional measures for FRPP. Each meal produced under the FRPP was individually tested for leaks. Further, an SFA-accredited laboratory conducted sample microbiological testing to ensure food safety.
7. Members asked about steps taken to restore public confidence in the safety of RTE meals used in resilience programmes. We agree that we need to restore public confidence in the RTE meals. As investigation is ongoing, it is still too early to state the steps to take. SFA will conduct an After-Action-Review to draw and learn from the lessons of this episode. SFA will continue to engage stakeholders, including schools, food businesses and community partners on our FRPP.

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