Food Safety Measures in Japan*1

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The widespread outbreak of enterohemorrhagic E. coli O157 food poisoning that occurred in 1996 saw some 9,451 people infected with the bacteria and took the precious lives of 12. Furthermore, the accident at the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant that occurred in March 2011 following the Great East Japan Earthquake led to increasing concerns about the impact of radioactive materials on food, due also to the influence of media reports.

In addition, Japan still retains its traditional food culture of consuming raw meat, and in recent years there has been a string of food poisoning incidents due to this practice.

Against this background, the general public's concerns regarding food safety have been gradually increasing, and the Japanese Government has implemented various measures, including the enactment of the Food Safety Basic Act, launch of the Food Safety Commission, and establishment of the Consumer Affairs Agency.

Moreover, Japan’s food self-sufficiency rate in FY 2014 was 39% based on calories (64% based on production value), and so the reality of the situation is that Japan's food supply is sustained by imports from various other countries; thus, safety management of imported foods (foodstuffs) is also an issue.

In this symposium, we will provide an outline of Japan's food safety measures as well as introduce some of the activities of the Japan Medical Association with regard to food safety.

*1 This article is based on a presentation made at the Symposium “Ensuring Food Safety: An Important Challenge Today” held at the 30th CMAAO General Assembly and 51st Council Meeting, Yangon, Myanmar, on September 23-25, 2015.
FOOD SAFETY MEASURES IN JAPAN

Recent Food Poisoning and Related Events

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year/Month</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2008 Jan</td>
<td>Organophosphate poisoning from frozen dumplings made in China</td>
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<tr>
<td>2009 Sep</td>
<td>Birth of Consumer Affairs Agency</td>
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<td>2010 May</td>
<td>First ministerial conference for Japan–China Food Safety Promotion Initiative</td>
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<tr>
<td>2011 Mar</td>
<td>In response to the TEPCO Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant’s accident, provisional regulation values for radioactive materials in food were established</td>
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<td>2012 Oct</td>
<td>Establishment of a regulation standard for rare earth consumption</td>
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<td>2013 Feb</td>
<td>Re-examination of import requirements (e.g. age in months, SRM) for imported beef (from USA, Canada, France, and Netherlands)</td>
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<tr>
<td>2014 Jul</td>
<td>Discovery that a food processing company in Shanghai was using expired chicken meat in their production lines. Discovery of suspected rodenticide in imported frozen small processed in Vietnam.</td>
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Risk Analysis

- Carry out risk assessment: Assess the likelihood and degree of adverse effect, if and when a substance that is potentially harmful to human health is contained in food.

Risk Management

- Set standards for food labeling:
  - Food Sanitation Act: Health Promotion Act
  - Risk Management: Food Safety Commission

Risk Communication

- Disclose information on food safety
- Ensure opportunities for those involved, including consumers, to express opinions

Food Safety Commission

- MHLW
  - Set standards for the contents of foods
  - Monitor adherence to the standards

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Efforts for Food Safety (Risk Analysis)

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Flow of Responses to Food Poisoning

- When there are >50 patients with food poisoning or when there is a chance of that happening
- When food poisoning patients occur over a wide area, or when there is a chance of that happening

An Example of JMA’s Efforts: Data Collection

- The mass food poisoning by O157 that occurred nationwide in 1996 produced 9,461 confirmed patients in 12 month with 12 fatalities.
- In light of this situation, JMA started collecting data on infectious diseases and food poisoning by prefecture since June 1997. The information is available on the JMA website.

An Example of JMA’s Efforts: Leaflet

- In order to prevent the spread of food poisoning, prompt realization of the onset and swift response are essential. JMA prepared a leaflet about reporting food poisoning incidents in March 2009 as a joint effort with MHLW and the Japanese Association of Public Health Center Directors.
- The leaflet was distributed to all JMA members to promote awareness of the need to promptly report a food poisoning incident to a public health center, as stipulated in the Food Sanitation Act.
The market size for health food and supplements in Japan is estimated to be 1.5 trillion yen (124 hundred Million USD, FY 2012), indicating a strong interest in health among people.

On the other hand, some cases of damage to health due to health food intake have been reported.

It may reduce the efficacy of medication or cause side effects.

A patient who believes the advertisement and publicity about the therapeutic effects of health food may miss a chance to seek medical attention.

Be aware that the consumption of health food also has risks. For example, it may cause a delay in ascertaining an interaction or identifying a cause when a patient is concealing his/her consumption of health food.

Make sure to eat 3 well-balanced meals a day.

Make sure to obtain necessary daily nutrients from your daily diet.

Inform your physician that you are consuming health food.

If you feel that something is wrong, immediately consult your physician!

JMA is trying to prevent damage from health food from spreading through its Health Food Safety Information System Project. The project involves collecting relevant information from physicians that they learn through their daily practice, developing ways to address the issue at the JMA’s Safety Management for People’s Living Committee, and giving feedback to clinical practice.

The water quality in public zones of rivers and oceans were deteriorating all over Japan, and the government promoted legislation with various pollution prevention measures to address the pollution occurring nationwide.

The Basic Act for Environmental Pollution Control, aimed at implementing pollution management comprehensively and systematically, was established in 1967. Additional regulations and a penalty system with no probation were also introduced through new legislation or revision of existing laws in the 1970s. The foundation of the environmental policy of the government administration we have today was established during those years.
Current Status
- The Minamata Convention was adopted during the diplomatic conference of October 2013 to protect human health and environment from mercury and its compounds. Nations worldwide are currently making preparations toward the enforcement of the treaty.
- After its enforcement in 2020, the manufacturing, as well as import and export of mercury-containing products, will be banned, in principle.
- Mercury manometers and thermometers are still being used at many medical and healthcare facilities including nursing schools as well as in private homes. Confusion is likely to occur when the Minamata Convention on Mercury goes into effect.

JMA demand that the government...
1. Provides a subsidy for proper disposal of mercury wastes, such as mercury manometers and thermometers, at medical and healthcare facilities including schools.
2. Expands the Collect Mercury Monometers and Thermometers Promotion Project that is currently carried out locally to a nationwide campaign.