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# Officials test school lunches to ease parents' fears

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Municipal governments in the Tokyo area are taking action to make sure parents know their children's school lunches are safe from radiation.

Although the governments still assume food available in supermarkets is safe, moves such as listing the origin of ingredients in school lunches reflect an attempt to appease worried parents.

In Yokohama, the school board chooses one vegetable item from the lunch menu to be served the next day.

The selected food item is delivered by a contracted food supplier to a testing institution, where radiation checks are conducted. The results are made available on the city government's website the next day.

An official of the board's health and education division said the project is intended merely to make parents feel better; not because the organization suspects that children in the city are likely to be exposed to radiation through their food.

The board tested green peppers and green onions from Ibaraki Prefecture and komatsuna spinach from Gunma Prefecture. No vegetables were detected with radiation above safe standards.

In Setagaya Ward, Tokyo, the municipal government tested milk--considered to likely contain concentrated levels of radiation--from June 27 to June 30. It examined 2 liters of milk designated for each elementary and junior high school and nursery school in the ward. Nothing untoward was found.

In Tokyo's Shinjuku Ward, the local government requires all elementary, junior high and nursery schools to list the origin of ingredients used for school lunches and snacks.

Because food detected with radiation above standard levels cannot be shipped to market, officials consider it extremely unlikely any could slip into school lunches.

A nutritionist in Tokyo said that although she understands parents' anxieties, she has reservations about recommending foods from particular regions be avoided because it could fuel rumors of contaminated foods.

The efforts to check school lunches were spurred by demands by parents that municipal governments do something.

In Yokohama, a group of parents submitted a 2,000-signature petition in May demanding the city procure ingredients for school lunches from outside radiation-contaminated regions.

The city government, citing high procurement costs, initially rejected the petition, but started conducting radiation tests in mid-June after deciding it couldn't simply ignore the group.

The assembly of Minato Ward, Tokyo, on June 24 unanimously approved a petition calling for a "zero radiation declaration" to eliminate children's exposure to internal radiation through school lunch ingredients and cooking.

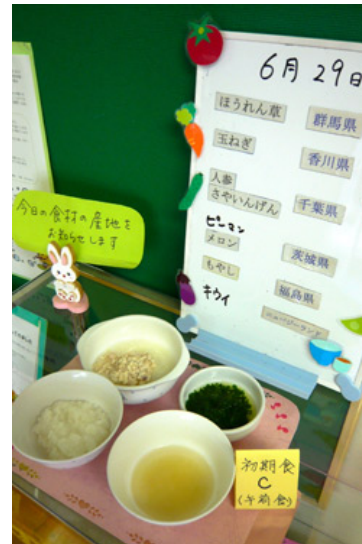
Other municipal assemblies of Hachioji and Katsushika Ward, both in Tokyo, approved a petition requesting radiation tests for school lunch

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The origin of school lunch ingredients is listed next to a sample meal at the Waseda-Minami-cho nursery school in Shinjuku Ward, Tokyo. (Ikuho Maesa)



In other wards of Tokyo, such as Koto, Nerima and Taito wards, parents formed citizens' groups to submit similar petitions to municipal governments.

Masato Koyama, a professor at Shizuoka University specializing in disaster prevention studies, said after the authorities withheld information on radiation contamination fearing disclosure could trigger panic, people are now more skeptical of what they are told.

Koyama also said insufficient plans to check ingredients for radiation contributed to public distrust. Providing information on the origin of ingredients could go a long way to allaying concerns, he said.

(This article was written by Ikuho Maeda and Satomi Sugihara.)

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