Kan widens ban on contaminated food

By MASAMI ITO
Staff writer

Prime Minister Naoto Kan instructed Fukushima Gov. Yuhei Sato on Wednesday to tell local people not to eat certain leafy vegetables, including spinach, cabbage and broccoli harvested from Fukushima Prefecture, after finding radioactive materials well beyond the legal limit. In addition, shipments of milk and parsley from Ibaraki Prefecture as well as vegetables from Fukushima were also suspended.

But government officials once again stressed there were no immediate health risks and the orders were given as "precautionary" measures.

"Even if people have already consumed (the listed vegetables or milk from Fukushima and Ibaraki), their health will not be endangered," said Chief Cabinet Secretary Yukio Edano.

"But we gave these orders . . . as precautionary measures from early on as the current situation, unfortunately, is expected to extend over a long period of time."

According to the health ministry, out of 35 sampled vegetables, 25 exceeded the government's limit of cesium of 500 becquerels per kilogram and 21 exceeded the iodine limit of 2,000 becquerels. The highest amount of cesium was found in "kukitachina," a vegetable, with a total of 82,000 becquerels, 164 times the legal limit.

Edano, however, said that even if someone were to eat radioactive kukitachina for 10 days in a row, the total amount of radioactive material consumed would be half of what a person is exposed to in the natural environment in a year and would pose no future health risks.

Under the new orders, people are urged not to eat spinach, "komatsuna" mustard plant, cabbage, broccoli, cauliflower from Fukushima. Shipments of such vegetables and turnips have been halted "for a while."

Other examples of vegetables found to be over the legal limit included broccoli, with 17,000 becquerels of iodine and 13,900 becquerels of cesium and cabbage with 5,200 becquerels of iodine and 2,600 becquerels of cesium. Both were from Fukushima.

Edano said that while the National Federation of Agricultural Cooperative Associations (JA Zennou) had stopped shipments of all outside-grown vegetables from Fukushima since Monday, some may have been distributed outside the JA network.

The government had Sunday suspended shipments of spinach and and "kakina," another leafy vegetable, from Fukushima, Ibaraki, Tochigi and Gunma. Safe, so far: Spinach and other leaf vegetables are displayed Wednesday in Shinagawa Ward, Tokyo, together with signs that they are from Kanagawa Prefecture. KYODO PHOTO

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Just when it seemed nothing was going right for Japan's Prime Minister Naoto Kan, he expanded a ban on contaminated food.

The ban on the sale of "shin red beets," a leafy vegetable, was announced Saturday in the prefectures of Ibaraki, Tochigi and Gunma. Milk from Fukushima was also suspended the same day.

But this is the first time since the damage at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant that people have been asked not to eat certain items.

"Higher levels (of radioactive material) have been found since we halted shipments and . . . the possibility of risks has increased," Edano said.

"Therefore, we consider it advisable as a precaution for people not only to avoid shipping but also consuming" these items.

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