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Detection of melamine in milk using nanopillar filters and Raman spectroscopy

Onur Durucan*1, Tomas Rindzevicius1, Michael Stenbæk Schmidt1, Marco Matteucci1, Anja Boisen1

1: Department of Micro- and Nanotechnology, Technical University of Denmark, Kongens Lyngby, DK-2800, Denmark
*onurd@nanotech.dtu.dk

We present a simple, robust, and automated method for detecting trace amounts of melamine in milk using nanostructured surface enhanced Raman spectroscopy (SERS) substrates integrated in centrifugal microfluidic platform [1]. Fast and facile extraction of the food adulterant (melamine) from milk on a SERS substrate was demonstrated down to 10 ppm within 10 minutes. The unique characteristic of the detection method is a “filter paper/chromatographic” effect which combines centrifugal forces and wetting properties of the SERS substrate to remove lipids and larger particles and leave a purified area for melamine detection.

The work addresses issues related to SERS-based detection of analytes in complex media, which is important for realizing next generation SERS platforms applicable for a fast and affordable while at the same time sensitive sensors within food safety.

Figure 1. (a,b) Photographs of fabricated microfluidic disc. (c,d,e,f) Schematic illustration of the three-step filtration procedure: (c) the sample is injected, the disc is at rest; (d) the rotation frequency of the disc is 47.5 Hz, the sample under the action of centrifugal force is transferred to the sensing chamber and partially covered the SERS substrate; (e,f) the sample removal process with the help of pneumatic chamber and capillary channels under 25 Hz rotational frequency. (g) Real-time image series recorded during the filtration stage (d), the wet area is gradually increased and covered the whole chip in 60 s through the capillary wicking effect. (h) Illustrative drawing of capillary based wicking-filtration phenomenon on AuNP structures at the immersion boundary. [1]