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Time for action on kids and food colours

Food industry silence and a limp reaction from Australia's food regulator, Food Standards Australia New Zealand, has greeted new UK findings of harm from artificial colours and one preservative in food.

"For 15 years food regulators in Australia have been saying 'show us the research' when we complain about artificial colours and their effects on children's behaviour, yet now when the highest quality research is available they go lame on us," said Dr Howard Dengate of the Food Intolerance Network.

"It is the time for Australian industry, like that in the UK, to take action and remove these nasty chemicals from food that children eat," he said.

All major UK supermarkets, including Marks & Spencer, Asda, Sainsbury's, Tesco and the Co-op, have already acted by promising to remove all artificial colours and some other additives by the end of the year.

The UK Food Standards Authority has convened an industry meeting for them to say what they are doing to eliminate artificial colours, which are superfluous in foods, and sodium benzoate.

In Australia, all we get is a bureaucrat's factsheet which minimises the impact of these colours at every opportunity and trots out the old idea that "adverse reactions to foods and food additives occur in a small proportion of the population".

"A preliminary study from the Isle of Wight showed that 51% of children were affected behaviourally, which is the majority of the school population," said Dengate.

"If FSANZ has better evidence that only a few are affected, please provide it," challenged Dengate, "And don't just tell us to read the labels – kids don't know what to avoid and the print's too small".

The Lancet research, performed by Southampton University, confirms worsening behaviour in children aged 3 to 9 caused by food colourings and a common food preservative.

The researchers showed that adverse effects are seen in the general population and not just in children with hyperactivity such as ADHD.

The "significantly adverse" effects observed included tantrums, poor concentration and slow progress at school.

The additives tested included artificial colours widely used in Australian foods such as sunset yellow (number 110), carmoisine (122), tartrazine (102) and ponceau red (124) and the common preservative sodium benzoate (211).

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Further resources: www.fedupwithfoodadditives.info/features/colours/colours.htm