

Comments from the Food Intolerance Network (FIN) on the recent Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ) factsheet “Effects of artificial colours on children’s behaviour”

See the original FSANZ factsheet at <http://www.foodstandards.gov.au/newsroom/factsheets/factsheets2007/effectsofartificialc3658.cfm>. Bold emphases below added by FIN.

6 September 2007

“New research into the **possible** effects of artificial food colours on children’s behaviour was published on 6 September, 2007 in the medical journal *The Lancet*. This study has been reviewed by experts in the United Kingdom and is described by the Food Standards Agency there as a **helpful additional contribution** to our knowledge on the **possible** effects of artificial food colours on children’s behaviour.”

COMMENT from FIN: Over 30 years of research have consistently shown that there are negative effects from colours. The few studies which did not support this view can be criticised on procedural grounds. The latest study, published in the *Lancet* on 6/9/2007, is a gold-standard double-blind placebo-controlled study with over 300 children. It is time to stop minimising the harm and to stop talking about “possible” effects – effects are proven by the best that science can manage. To say otherwise is patronising to both science and parents.

“Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ) is aware of the study and we are **currently examining it.**”

COMMENT from FIN: Whoopie doo! In the UK the Food Standards Authority has warned parents not to feed these additives to their children and have arranged a meeting with industry to see what they are doing to “eliminate artificial colours, which are superfluous in foods”. What will it take to have FSANZ act to protect the consumer instead of the food industry?

“Adverse reactions to foods and food additives occur in a **small proportion of the population**. These reactions are not the same as allergies but may include rashes and swelling of the skin, irritable bowel symptoms, behavioural changes in children and headaches.”

COMMENT from FIN: Every time we are reassured that food additives only affect “a small proportion of the population.” The scientific facts are otherwise. In a preliminary study by the same research group from Southampton University, conducted on the Isle of Wight, 51% of children showed behavioural reactions to several food colours and one food preservative according to parent’s ratings if placebo effects are ignored. Even the conservative World Health Organisation says that 20-30% of children are affected by sulphite preservatives (found in dried fruit and sausages, for instance) and that these should be phased out, while Australian research says the figure is nearer 60%. These are the MAJORITY of the children in our schools. If FSANZ has evidence about this “small proportion”, let them produce it!

“Additives, including artificial colours, may not be included in foods unless they are **approved** and included in the Australia New Zealand Food Standards Code. Artificial colours which are in a food or drink to perform a function must be identified on the label with either its name or its specific code number.”

COMMENT from FIN: The approval process is fundamentally flawed because it does not include tests on children (“it would be unethical to do so” I was told) and does not take into account any behavioural and learning effects. So an additive can be proven to cause behavioural effects but it would be still be safe and approved

according to FSANZ. Who is this flawed process protecting? What is the cost to our education system of having disruptive children in every class?

“Parents can use this information to identify when the additives included in this study are in their child’s diet, but it should not be assumed that simply **taking these additives out of a child’s diet** will eliminate these symptoms. If you think you or your child has a food intolerance we recommend you seek advice from a medical practitioner or accredited practising dietitian.”

COMMENT from FIN: FIN has recently supervised trials at three schools, including teaching over 300 young children how to read labels. It is noteworthy that children don’t know which additives to avoid and frequently are unable to read the labels because they are illegible due to size or colour, or they are too young to read. Surely the appropriate public health response would be to remove these additives proven to cause harm from the food supply, not to continue to provide them when safe alternatives exist? The responsibility should be on FSANZ to protect consumers and not to allow proven harmful additives into the food supply and then expect parents and children to take responsibility for negotiating the world of chemicals and ingredients labels.

“FSANZ has recently published “**Choosing the Right Stuff - the official shoppers’ guide to food additives and labels, kilojoules and fat content**” which is available in bookshops. This guide provides consumers with the information they need to purchase products that do not contain the food additives they wish to avoid. Lists of food additives are also available free from FSANZs website

at: <http://www.foodstandards.gov.au/newsroom/publications/choosingtherightstuff/index.cfm>

“The New Zealand Food Safety Authority has also produced a **pocket sized booklet** entitled ‘Identifying Food Additives’”

COMMENT from FIN: Needless to say, these booklets do not identify those 60 additives out of about 400 to which people may react – even the sulphites, to which so many asthmatic children react, are not mentioned as a problem.

Comments by Dr Howard Dengate based on FSANZ Factsheet as of 12/9/2007.
