

From the Acting Chief Medical Officer
Dr Elizabeth Mitchell



Department of
**Health, Social Services
and Public Safety**

www.dhsspsni.gov.uk

AN ROINN

**Sláinte, Seirbhísí Sóisialta
agus Sábháilteachta Poiblí**

MÄNNYSTRIE O

**Poustie, Resydënter Heisin
an Fowk Siccar**

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HSS(MD)20/2009

To:

All General Practitioners
(for cascade to appropriate staff incl. practice nurses)

Chief Executive, HSC Board
Family Practitioner Services Leads, HSC Board
Pharmacy Leads, HSC Board

Chief Executive, Public Health Agency
Director of Public Health, Public Health Agency
Director of Nursing and Allied Health Professionals, Public
Health Agency

Chief Executives, HSC Trusts
Medical Directors, HSC Trusts
(for cascade to appropriate medical staff)
Directors of Nursing, HSC Trusts
*(for attention of health visitors, children's nurses
and midwives)*

Directors of Pharmacy, HSC Trusts
Dietetic Managers, HSC Trusts

Local Supervising Authority Midwifery Officer
Regulation & Quality Improvement Authority

cc: Directors of Children's Services

Your Ref:
Our Ref: HSS(MD)20/2009
Date: 21 May 2009

Dear Colleagues

**ADVICE TO AVOID RICE DRINKS FOR TODDLERS DUE TO RISK OF EXPOSURE TO
INORGANIC ARSENIC**

The Food Standards Agency (FSA) has today issued an announcement about total and inorganic arsenic levels in 60 samples of rice drinks available in the UK. Low levels of inorganic arsenic were detected in rice drinks (12 µg/kg of rice drink).

Rice drink (also known as rice milk) is a blend of filtered water and rice and is usually marketed as either a 'dairy free-alternative to cows' milk' or a 'low-fat drink' and are usually consumed by those who wish to avoid dairy foods.

Arsenic occurs naturally at low levels as organic and inorganic forms in a wide range of foods. Most arsenic in the diet is present in the less harmful organic form but the inorganic form is known to cause cancer. The Committee on Toxicity has not been able to

set specific thresholds of exposure (tolerable intakes) for inorganic arsenic, and has advised that exposure to arsenic should be as low as reasonably practicable.

Toddlers and young children may be particularly vulnerable, because of their proportionally higher milk intake and are likely to have higher dietary exposure to inorganic arsenic per kilogram of body weight. A toddler/young child consuming about half a pint of rice drink a day, (instead of cows' milk) is likely to double his total dietary exposure to inorganic arsenic. **Therefore as a precaution children under 5 years old should not consume rice drinks**

Older children and adults who consume rice drinks are likely to have a lower exposure and FSA advise that they do not need to change their diet.

Further details of the FSA survey of rice and rice products is available on www.food.gov.uk


In advising on feeding babies and young children our advice is:

- Babies up to 6 months should be exclusively breastfed. Where mothers choose not to breast feed, breast milk substitute (formula) can be used. Infants with proven cow's milk protein intolerance can be prescribed an extensively hydrolysed infant formula.
- From 6 months other foods should be gradually introduced along side breast milk or infant formula;
- Children over 1 year can have cows milk introduced to their diet;
- **Toddlers and young children should avoid rice drinks**
- Toddlers and young children with diagnosed allergy to cows' milk and soya drink who are currently consuming rice drinks should be advised of suitable alternatives such as fully hydrolysed infant formula or oat or almond drinks. Growth and development of these children should be monitored and parents should receive specific dietary advice to ensure that their nutritional needs particularly of calcium are met through a diversified diet.

Yours sincerely



Dr Elizabeth Mitchell
Acting Chief Medical Officer



Mr Martin Bradley
Chief Nursing Officer

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