



FDA concludes study of arsenic in rice products; no dietary changes recommended

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) released new data today following a recent investigation of levels of arsenic in rice and rice products, but is not recommending any dietary changes for consumers.

While the FDA found variable quantities of arsenic in 1,340 rice products in 30 categories of food (see Resources), the results did not rise to a level of concern, according to an agency spokesperson.

Samples were conducted for total arsenic levels and levels of two forms of the more dangerous, inorganic arsenic. The FDA data found the quantities of arsenic varied within food categories and among products in the same category. Products tested included plain rice and rice-containing foods and beverages such as rice water, rice snacks, cakes, pastas and ready-to-eat cereals.

The report, “Analytical Results from Inorganic Arsenic in Rice and Rice Products Sampling — September 2013,” also lists country and state of origin of each food product, and incorporates previous sampling completed in 2012.

Among grain products, brown rice showed the highest levels of arsenic. Other items with relatively higher levels included pastas, rice cakes and infant cereals.

The *average* level of arsenic ranged from a low of 0.1 micrograms (mcg) per serving in infant formula to a high of 7.2 mcg in brown rice, which is 160 parts per billion (ppb) of total arsenic. There are no federal limits for arsenic in most foods.

To cut arsenic risk, the Academy and the FDA recommend families eat a wide variety of foods for a well-balanced diet that includes grains other than rice, such as wheat, barley and oats.

“These FDA data are reassuring,” said Stephen R. Daniels, M.D., Ph.D., chair of the AAP Committee on Nutrition. “While there is inorganic arsenic in rice and rice products, it is at a level that should be safe for consumption across the population. Diets that follow the AAP guidelines include a variety of foods and a variety of grains and remain a healthful approach to eating for children and adolescents.”

Rice cereal, often served as an infant’s first solid food, is no better than other first foods, according to the Academy and the FDA. Additional options include finely chopped meat, which provides iron; vegetable purees, or cereals made from other grains. The Academy does not recommend rice milk for infants.

Last year, Consumer Reports found measurable amounts of both inorganic and organic arsenic in 223 samples of rice products, suggesting a standard should be set for rice. Its September 2012 report provided examples of how families might limit weekly servings of types of rice products for both children and adults (see Resources).

While FDA testing has been ongoing, the agency indicated earlier this year it would test 1,000 additional samples by the end of the year and issue any needed recommendations at that time.

In July, the FDA proposed limiting arsenic in apple juice to 10 parts per billion, the level the Environmental Protection Agency set for arsenic in drinking water. However, the FDA noted it remained confident in the overall safety of apple juice for children and adults.

The FDA will conduct additional tests of samples of infant and toddler rice products in the coming months.

RESOURCES

- Access the FDA reports at www.fda.gov/ForConsumers/ConsumerUpdates/ucm352569.htm
- For AAP resources, visit the web page at <http://www.aap.org/en-us/about-the-aap/aap-press-room/Pages/AAP-Offers-Advice-For-Parents-Concerned-About-Arsenic-in-Food.aspx> (login required)
- Consumer Reports article, “Arsenic in your food,” www.consumerreports.org/cro/magazine/2012/11/arsenic-in-your-food/index.htm
- AAP News article (Sept. 19, 2012) on arsenic in rice, <http://aapnews.aapublications.org/content/early/2012/09/19/aapnews.20120919-2.full>