

Colours In Restaurant and Take-away Food

This leaflet provides guidance on the requirements of the Colour in Food Regulations (NI) 1996 particularly in relation to food sold in restaurants and as take-away meals.

The Regulations:

- . Allow only certain colours to be used in food,
- . Restrict the use of some colours to certain foods, and
- . Set maximum levels for some colours in certain foods

To Which Foods Do The Regulations apply?

The regulations apply to all foods but make specific requirements for certain foods, such as meat, fish and shellfish which may not be directly coloured however accompanying sauces and seasonings may contain colour ie only processed food products can contain added colouring.

Of particular relevance to restaurant and take-away meals are those which relate to "sauces, seasoning (for example – curry powder, tandoori), pickles, relishes, chutney and piccalilli". In these cases, only 500mg/kg in total of the following permitted colours is allowed whether used singly or in any combination. At the present time there are a number of permitted colours which satisfy purity criteria which have been allocated an "E" number. This indicates that they have been extensively tested and accepted as safe throughout the European Community when used with in levels imposed by the Regulations.

E100	Curcumin
E102	Tartrazine
E104	Quinoline Yellow
E110	Sunset Yellow FCF, Orange Yellow S
E120	Cochineal, Carminic Acid, Carmines
E122	Azorubine, Carmoisine
E124	Ponceau 4R, Cochineal Red A
E129	Allura Red AC
E131	Patent Blue V
E132	Indigotine, Indigo Carmine
E133	Brilliant Blue FCF
E142	Green S
E151	Brilliant Black BN, Black PN
E155	Brown HT

E160d	Lycopene
E160e	Beta-apo-8'-carotenal (C30)
E160f	Ethyl ester of Beta-apo-8'carotenic acid (C30)
E161b	Lutein

Rice is only able to contain colour introduced by ingredients added to it, such as seasonings.

Why Are These Controlled?

The use of these colours in food is controlled because excessive consumption has been linked to allergic reactions, skin rash, gastric problems, vomiting or a worsening of asthma.

How Can I Avoid Selling Food With Excess Or Non- permitted Colours?

In each case you should obtain written confirmation from your supplier that a product complies with the provisions of the Food Safety (NI) Order 1991 and the Colours in Food Regulations (NI) 1996.

Always ensure that you and any employees follow the instructions supplied with the seasoning/colour. If there are no instructions, or if the instructions are not clear, ask your supplier for further details in writing. Do not guess or rely on information given only verbally.

If you import the seasoning/colour directly, or manufacture it yourself you should seek more detailed advice from your local Environmental Health Department.

What Can Happen If I Sell A Food Containing Excess Or Non- permitted Colours?

Your customers' health may be put at risk. It is a criminal offence to sell food which does not comply with the Colours in Food Regulations (NI) 1996 and if you are found guilty a court can impose a fine of up to £5,000.

What About Other Additives?

There are other regulations which control the use of all additives used in food. It is important that you always obtain written confirmation from your suppliers that their product conform to the relevant requirements. If you import the products directly ask your local Environmental Health Department for further advice. You must always ensure that any instructions for use are followed and, if in doubt, check – do not guess.

Why Are These Limits On The Amounts Of Colours, Which Can Be Used?

Scientific research has determined the levels of food additives that human bodies can absorb without adversely affecting their metabolism. This is known as the Acceptable Daily Intake (ADI)

May All Colours Be Sold By Retail?

Most can, but there are 8 colours, which specifically need to be restricted because of their exceptionally low ADI.

These are:

- . E123 Amaranth
- . E127 Erythrosine
- . E128 Red 2G
- . E154 Brown FK
- . E160b Annatto, bixin, norbixin
- . E161g Canthaxanthin
- . E173 Aluminium; and
- . E180 Litholrubine BK

It is ILLEGAL to sell any of these colours directly to the consumer. It is also an OFFENCE to sell any food having in it, or on it, any colour other than a permitted colour.

Do I Have To Declare The Presence Of Food Colours?

Pre-packed food generally requires a list of ingredients, compiled in descending order by weight. The colours must be stated by their category and specific name and/or "E" number, e.g. colours (E102, E110) or colours (tartrazine, sunset yellow).

Non-prepacked items require an indication of the category name of the additives used e.g. "sausages contain preservatives and colour". Many meals sold in restaurants, pubs and from take-aways contain colours. Whilst colouring in food sold from catering establishments does not have to be declared, the maximum limits must not be exceeded. It is an offence to sell food containing excessive colouring.

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