

Supplement EU maximum levels for inorganic arsenic in rice and rice products through consumption recommendations for the protection of infants, toddlers and children

Updated BfR Opinion No. 017/2015 of 06 February 2014¹

Rice and rice-based products, such as rice cakes or rice flakes for creamed rice, can contain relatively high levels of inorganic arsenic. Inorganic arsenic is classified as carcinogenic for humans by international panels and no intake quantity can be defined as safe for human health with regard to its carcinogenic effect (cf. BfR opinion 018/2015). In the European Union, the introduction of maximum levels for inorganic arsenic in rice and rice products is being discussed on the basis of the health assessment of the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA)². The Federal Institute for Risk Assessment (BfR) has assessed the proposed maximum levels for rice and rice products from a health point of view and comes to the conclusion that the maximum level of 0.2 milligrams of inorganic arsenic per kilogram recommended for white rice is only suitable to avoid particularly high levels in rice. The proposal to introduce lower maximum levels for products used in the manufacture and preparation of baby food such as rice flakes for the production of creamed rice is endorsed by the BfR. The Institute does point out, however, that even under the assumption of concentrations of inorganic arsenic at the level of the recommended maximum limit of 0.1 milligrams per kilogram, the exposure of infants and toddlers to inorganic arsenic in rice flakes/creamed rice can still be high due to the fact that children consume comparatively large quantities of food in relation to their body weight. The BfR considers accompanying measures to be necessary for this reason. It should, for example, be recommended that parents do not feed children and infants exclusively on the basis of rice or rice-based cereal products such as rice cakes or creamed rice/rice flakes, respectively / or rather that they alternate them with products based on other cereal types.

The full version of this BfR Opinion is available in German on

<http://www.bfr.bund.de/cm/343/eu-hoehstgehalte-fuer-anorganisches-arsen-in-reis-und-reisprodukten-durch-verzehrsempfehlungen-zum-schutz-von-saeuglingen-kleinkindern-und-kindern-ergaenzen.pdf>

¹ The opinion was expanded to include contents of another opinion of 17 September 2014

² Maximum levels for inorganic arsenic in foods have been adopted in the meantime by the EU Commission's Standing Committee on Plants, Animals, Food and Feed (SCoPAFF) for the following food categories (milled rice, non-parboiled (polished and white) rice; parboiled and husked rice; rice biscuits, rice waffles, rice crackers and rice cakes; rice for the production of food for babies and infants). According to the draft regulation of 13.03.2015, the introduction of the maximum levels is scheduled for 01 January 2016.