

## Sulphites

(June 2016)

Sulphites are naturally occurring minerals that have a long history of use in foods. They naturally occur in some foods but are widely used as an additive to prevent microbial spoilage and preserve colour. Cordials, dried fruit, sausages and wine are some of the foods that commonly contain sulphites.

International scientific committees and FSANZ have thoroughly investigated the safety of sulphites and concluded that for most people sulphites are safe. However some sulphite-sensitive people, many of whom also have asthma, may react to sulphites with allergy-like symptoms.

Following surveys of levels of benzoates and sulphites in foods in Australia and New Zealand FSANZ evaluated whether there were any issues with those levels and exposure.

FSANZ was able to conclude early on that there were no issues with benzoates but there was a potential for exceedances of the acceptable daily intake (ADI) for sulphites in some children who were high consumers of certain foods. However FSANZ also identified some uncertainties about the current ADI.

The FSANZ assessment recognises the ADI for sulphites (set in 1974) suffered from significant flaws in design and implementation. These flaws and further work carried out by FSANZ mean it's unlikely that current levels of sulphites in foods pose a risk to consumers, including children. Based on these considerations, FSANZ abandoned the proposal.

The European Food Safety Authority has also issued a scientific opinion on sulphites, which raises uncertainties about the validity of the current ADI.

Read the EFSA scientific opinion on the re-evaluation of sulphites [here](#).

The permissions for sulphites in the Code will be considered again after further international evaluations.

Read the proposal documents

### What can I do if I am concerned about sulphites in my child's diet?

A balanced diet means all foods should be eaten in moderation and some foods should not be eaten every day. If you are concerned about your child's exposure to sulphites then you should limit their intake of foods that are major contributors of sulphites, particularly cordials, dried fruit and sausages.

For more information about a healthy balanced diet [read the dietary guidelines for Australia and New Zealand](#).

### Labelling

Under the Food Standards Code added sulphites must be declared in the ingredients list on the label of a packaged food when present in foods in concentrations of 10 mg/kg or more.

This allows consumers who may be sensitive to sulphites to avoid them.

When a manufacturer meets this requirement by declaring sulphites in an ingredient list, the sulphites must be labelled by their prescribed class name (e.g. preservative), followed by the additive's specific name (e.g. sulphur dioxide) or code number (e.g. 220 to 228).

If the food is unpackaged (e.g. dried apricots sold in bulk bins, sausages in a butchers shop), the presence of sulphites must be declared on or in connection with the display of the food, or the purchaser can request this information.

### More information

[Proposal 298 – Benzoate and sulphite permissions in food](#)

[History of the proposal](#)

[Sulphites survey \(2012\)](#)

[Survey of sulphites in dried apricots \(2008\)](#)

---

Was this page helpful to you? [Yes](#) | [No](#)

[Print](#)

[Return to top](#)