

FSA updates advice on risk to children of glycerol in slush ice drinks

At its meeting on Wednesday 18 June, the Board endorsed advice that slush ice drinks containing glycerol are not suitable for children under seven. They also asked for this to be clearly communicated to parents and carers and directed officials to develop a 'greatly enhanced voluntary approach' for industry to help manage glycerol intake in young children over the longer-term.

'In the warm weather, children may be more likely to consume slush ice drinks containing glycerol, so it's important that parents and carers are aware of the risks. As a precaution, the FSA is recommending that children under seven do not consume slush ice drinks containing glycerol. With our counterparts in Scotland, we will be talking to parent groups and charities to provide updated guidance that is useful and applicable across the UK.

'We expect industry to share data on the quantity of glycerol in their products to inform our future work. Meanwhile, there are immediate actions they can take that can help protect children and reduce the risk from these products. For example, retailers should limit cup sizes and should not offer free refill promotions to children under 10.'

Professor Susan Jebb, FSA Chair

The findings of the latest FSA risk assessment on glycerol in slush ice drinks were discussed as part of the meeting. The assessment incorporated information from recent glycerol intoxication incidents and assessed the impact of one serving of slush ice drink (350ml with 50,000mg/L glycerol) on children with a lower-than-average body weight for their age. This most recent risk assessment takes a more precautionary approach than the initial risk assessment conducted in 2023, which was based on average body weight. As children's weights vary, body weight has been converted to age to provide more practical advice for parents and businesses.

Slush ice drinks can contain glycerol as a substitute for sugar to prevent them from freezing solid. Businesses are advised to only add glycerol at the minimum quantity technically necessary to achieve the slush effect. While glycerol is found in some other foods, it is added at much lower quantities than in slush ice drinks. Consumed at high levels, glycerol can cause very low blood sugar levels and unconsciousness in young children.

The updated advice applies to ready-to-drink slush ice drinks with glycerol in pouches and home kits containing glycerol slush concentrates. Information on the glycerol content, or a contact for the manufacturer for further information should be included on the label.