

Importing drinks

Guidance on licensing, labelling, packaging, chemical safety when importing drinks.

Imports of drinks which do not contain products of animal origin from countries outside the European Union (EU) must meet the same or equivalent food hygiene and compositional standards and procedures as food produced in the UK or other EU Member States. You do not normally need a health certificate to import such drinks and beverages.

There are stricter rules covering the import of drinks that are made from animal products from countries outside the EU. They must come from establishments that have been approved to UK or EU standards. Examples of these are drinks made with milk or milk products (like 'Nesquik' or smoothies) or with egg products (like advocaat or eggnog).

The import of these types of drinks is regulated by the Trade in Animals and Related Products (TARP) (England) Regulations 2011, and similar regulations in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Imports may only enter the UK/EU through approved Border Inspection Posts (BIPs). Here they will be checked to ensure they comply with the relevant animal and public health conditions.

The Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA) provides further information [through their website](#).

Labelling

GOV.UK provides further [information on food labeling](#) on their website.

For advice on the labelling of specific products, please contact your local authority's Trading Standards Department or Environmental Health Department. You can find contact details for these on their [website](#).

Alcoholic drinks

Please contact DEFRA for information on:

- the labelling and ingredient listing of alcoholic drinks
- marketing standards for spirit drinks (which include specific labelling and compositional requirements)
- [domestic wine policy](#)

Energy/sports drinks

Some energy drinks may contain ingredients which might be considered as medicines. Products like this where claims are made for the treatment or prevention of disease, or which are administered to restore, correct or modify physiological functions, fall within the definition of a medicine.

Your local Trading Standards Office should be contacted in the first instance. After reviewing this information, if it becomes evident that the product would not fall under the Food regulations and it is a medicinal product then you should [contact](#) the Medicines Borderline Section of the Medicines & Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) online.

Advertising nutrition and health claims

For information on advertising nutritional and health claims on foods, [please contact](#) DH customer service centre through their website.

Preservatives, food colourings, sweeteners and flavourings

Some drinks may contain preservatives, food colourings, sweeteners or flavourings. Although these may be approved by the food authority in the country of origin, some of them may not be approved in the EU or may have different permissions e.g. lower maximum levels of use, or only permitted in a small number of products.

For information on food flavourings, sweeteners, food colourings and preservatives, please contact our [Food Additives team](#).

Organics

If you are importing organic products (live or unprocessed agricultural products, processed agricultural for use as food or feed and vegetative propagating material and seeds for cultivation), from outside the EU, please contact the [Organic Imports team](#) through DEFRA's website.

For information on organic regulation and standards, (including labelling) within the UK please contact the [Organic Strategy](#) through DEFRA's website.

Packaging

Food contact materials and articles, including those used for food packaging, are controlled by a comprehensive EU harmonised legislation that has been fully implemented in the UK. This legislation is particularly thorough in its control of plastic materials and articles intended for food use.

For information on the safety of packaging please contact the [Food Contact Materials Team](#) by email.

Food hygiene

For general enquiries on food hygiene please contact the [Food Hygiene Policy Team](#) through DEFRA's website.

Pesticides

For information on pesticides safety levels for imports please contact the Health & Safety Executive's Chemicals Regulation Directorate (CRD).

Soft drinks and fruit juices

If the product is using a trademark name, such as 'Root Beer' please contact the [Information Centre](#) at the Intellectual Property Office (IPO).

Water

For information on the requirements for bottled water, please visit their [relevant pages online](#).

Contaminants

A guidance note on the Contaminants in Food (England) Regulations 2013, which make provision for enactment and enforcement of Commission Regulations setting regulatory limits for contaminants in food (nitrate, mycotoxins, metals, 3-MCPD, dioxins and PAHs), can be found at in our [archives](#).

Import restrictions

The permitted level of benzoic acid in soft drinks in the EU is 150 mg/l, imported drinks that exceed this level do not comply with EU requirements. Brominated Vegetable Oil (BVO) is not a permitted food additive in the EU. Calcium disodium EDTA (E385) and Erythorbic acid (E315) are not permitted food additives in drinks.

Southampton colours

The FSA has asked the UK food industry for a voluntary withdrawal of:

- Sunset yellow (E110)
- Quinoline yellow (E104)
- Carmoisine (E122)
- Allura red (E129)
- Tartrazine (E102)
- Ponceau 4R (E124)

If a product is labelled and contains one, or more, of the six specified colours they will require a warning on the label as required by Article 24 and Annex V of [Regulation No 1333/2008](#) to indicate that the colours may have an adverse effect on activity and attention in children.

Coca leaf tea from South America

It is illegal to import products made from coca leaf. For further information please contact the [Direct Communications Unit](#) at the Home Office, through their website.

Hoasca tea from Brazil

Hoasca tea from Brazil is used for religious purposes. There are restrictions regarding the import of this tea. For further information please contact the [Direct Communications Unit](#) at the Home Office, through their website.

Imports of feed and food from Japan

Imports of all feed and food originating in or consigned from Japan to the EU are subject to special conditions. This is following the accident at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant in Japan in 2011. This means consignments of feed and food can only enter the UK through specific ports and airports where official controls will be carried out.

For further information on imports of feed or food from Japan, please contact our [Imported Food Team](#).

Team contacts

Food contact materials team

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Food hygiene policy

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Food additives team

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Imported food team

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