

Importing herbs and spices

Guidance on importing herbs and spices from third countries.

Imports of herbs and spices from countries outside of GB must meet the same standards of food hygiene and safety procedures as food produced in GB.

You do not normally need a health certificate to import herbs and spices.

Standards for spices

UK law does not define standards for spices. However, advice from the Health Protection Agency (HPA) on 'end product' microbiological criteria may be helpful. The HPA is an independent body that protects the health and wellbeing of everyone in England and Wales.

APHA has [further information on the criteria](#).

Information on [UK standards for spices](#) is also available from the Seasoning and Spice Association's (SSA) website.

Food colourings, flavourings and sweeteners

Some herbs and spices may contain colourings, flavourings or sweeteners. Although these may be approved by the food authority in the country of origin, some of them may not be approved in GB.

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

Labelling

You will find general information about [food labelling](#) in the GOV.UK website.

For advice on the [labelling of specific products](#), contact your local authority's Trading Standards Department or Environmental Health Department.

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 third countries, contact the [Organic Imports team](#) through DEFRA's website.

For information on organic regulation and standards, (including labelling) within GB contact the Organic Strategy team also through DEFRA's website.

Packaging

Food contact materials and articles, including those used for food packaging, are controlled by assimilated law in GB.

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 [through our online form](#).

Food hygiene

For general enquiries on food hygiene please contact the Food Hygiene Policy Team.

Pesticides

For information on pesticides safety levels for imports please contact Health and Safety Executive's (HSE) Chemicals Regulation Directorate (CRD) through our website

Contaminants

The [Contaminants in Food \(England\) Regulations 2013](#) make provision for enactment and enforcement of assimilated law which sets out regulatory limits for contaminants in food, such as nitrate, mycotoxins, metals, 3-MCPD, dioxins and PAHs.

Import restrictions

There are some other import restrictions/requirements that can apply to herbs and spices of which importers need to be aware.

'Higher-risk' products

Imports of certain feed and food of non-animal origin that are considered 'higher-risk' can only enter GB through specific ports and airports which are designated [border control posts \(BCPs\)](#) where official controls will be carried out. A 'higher-risk' product is feed or food that is either known to be, or is, an emerging risk to public health.

Find out [more about importing high-risk food](#).

A complete [list of foods \(not of animal origin\) with current EU restrictions](#) is available.

Kava-kava

Since 9 January 2003 the herb kava-kava, and any food containing it, is banned from entry to the UK. This is because of concerns regarding its toxic effect on the liver.

For further information please contact the Department of Health [customer service centre](#).