# US continues to lag behind Europe in banning artificial food dyes linked to children's health risks



Growing up in Miami, many will recall nostalgic memories of candy floss, or cotton candy, in vibrant blue hues, reminiscent of the blue milk from Lucky Charms cereal bowls filled with marshmallow moons and rainbows. Such brightly coloured treats were childhood staples, alongside seasonal favourites like candy corn at Halloween and corn syrup for Thanksgiving baking. Yet, these vivid dyes, particularly artificial food colourings like brilliant blue dye, have increasingly come under scrutiny due to concerns about their impact on children's health.

A recent 2024 scientific review titled "Synthetic Colors in Food: A Warning for Children’s Health" highlights the possible toxicity of these additives. It points to their effects on cognitive, behavioural, metabolic, and nutritional development and links them specifically to attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). The review advocates for the substitution of synthetic dyes with those derived from natural sources.

In contrast to the United States, where these artificial colourings have long been commonplace in foods marketed towards children, the UK and European Union (EU) have imposed stringent regulations. The UK government passed the 1995 Colours in Food Regulations, banning certain colourants and mandating clear labelling through names or E numbers if specific synthetic dyes are present. Further steps were taken in 2008 when the Food Standards Agency recommended the removal of artificial food colours from products due to emerging evidence connecting them with ADHD in children. Since 2010, UK laws require that food and drink containing particular synthetic dyes display the warning: “may have an adverse effect on activity and attention in children”. In response, many food manufacturers have opted to use natural colourants such as beetroot, turmeric, matcha, and spirulina.

The regulatory measures in the UK and EU were deemed necessary because the food industry, driven by profit motives, had not voluntarily acted to reduce potentially harmful additives. Label warnings provide some consumer guidance, but many argue that removing risky colourings entirely from food products would best protect public health.

In the US, however, the situation remains markedly different. Despite increased evidence of health risks, artificial dyes continue to appear in many food products, some unchanged since the 1990s. Former President Joe Biden announced a ban on Red 3 dye in January 2025, following its association with cancer in animal studies. Nevertheless, food producers have until 2027 to comply with the phase-out. Until then, Red 3 remains permitted in foods like cakes, candies, and cookies without any accompanying health warnings.

This continued allowance of synthetic dyes, many banned or heavily regulated in Europe, means that American shelves are stocked with ultraprocessed foods containing multiple artificial additives. This regulatory divergence poses challenges for potential trade agreements, including a prospective UK-US deal, raising concerns about whether imported food items would meet UK safety standards. Comparatively, the UK aligns more closely with EU regulations on food safety, prompting some observers to suggest a trade deal with the EU would better maintain the UK's food safety baseline.

Interestingly, progress in the US on food additive regulation is emerging from Robert F. Kennedy Jr., the current US Secretary of Health and Human Services. He has launched the "Make America Healthy Again" (MAHA) initiative, focusing on stricter regulation of food additives and colourings. While some of Kennedy’s views have attracted controversy, his efforts on food safety mark a noteworthy development, albeit many years behind European standards.

Anecdotal experiences underscore these regulatory differences. A visitor returning to Miami found US supermarkets stocked with numerous ultraprocessed products containing chemicals banned in Europe, sold without warnings. A British acquaintance living in Miami noted that safer food options were typically found in the "British section" of stores, suggesting that British food products adhere to stricter safety standards even when sold abroad.

The disparity in regulations between the US and Europe continues to affect consumer choices and public health. While Europe has taken extensive measures to restrict potentially harmful synthetic food dyes, the US remains in the process of catching up.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

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