

France sees labelling of contested chemical BPA

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France's ecology minister on Tuesday said she would seek labelling requirements for food containers made with bisphenol A (BPA) after a watchdog agency sharpened its concern about this chemical.

Nathalie Kosciusko-Morizet said the report by the Agency for Food Health Safety (Anses) -- the French equivalent of the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) -- was "troubling".

"What I propose first of all is systematic labelling of products containing BPA when the product comes into contact with the public," the minister told AFP.

Labelling would be obligatory and the measure would be introduced swiftly, she said.

Kosciusko-Morizet said she would also propose a ban on BPA for specific products whenever the compound could be substituted by another chemical proven to be safe.

BPA is used in "polycarbonate" types of hard plastic bottles and as a protective lining in food and beverage cans.

It became a concern following evidence in lab animals of a toxic effect on the brain and nervous system.

Several countries have introduced voluntary measures or laws to stop the

manufacture of baby bottles with BPA and published guidelines on safer use of these containers. In June 2010, the French parliament banned BPA-containing baby bottles.

Anses on Tuesday issued a report summarising studies into BPA, saying even "low doses" of the chemical had had a "confirmed" effect on lab animals and a "suspected" effect on humans.

Preventing exposure to BPA among infants, pregnant or nursing women was a "priority goal," Anses said.

It said it would hand its investigation to the EU-wide European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) for consideration.

In September 2010, EFSA said that BPA was safe and there was no need to overhaul European limits of daily exposure, which are 0.05 milligrams per kilo of body weight. They were set in 2006.

Some studies have found a link between exposure to BPA and coronary heart disease and reproductive disorders.

But, EFSA said, the design of these studies made it impossible to conclude that BPA caused these problems.

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