

No need to panic over horsemeat scandal: EU official

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The EU's top health official on Friday said there was no need to panic over a Europe-wide horsemeat scandal, saying it was a labelling rather than a health issue.

"Till now this is not a [food safety](#) issue," EU Health and Consumer Affairs Commissioner Tonio Borg told reporters during a visit to Athens.

"We should not create panic ourselves. Sometimes the reaction can be irrational. Unless there is proof that it is a food safety issue we will treat it as a labelling issue," Borg said.

Supermarkets across Europe have pulled millions of frozen ready meals from the shelves since last week, after tests revealed that large quantities of [horsemeat](#) had made their way into products labelled as beef.

The scandal has exposed a sprawling web of abattoirs and meat suppliers—all of which deny fraudulently passing horsemeat off as beef—in countries including Britain, France, Luxembourg and Romania.

In addition to outrage from deceived consumers, there was concern after British officials revealed Thursday that the potentially harmful drug Phenylbutazone, a painkiller for horses more commonly known as 'bute', had been found in horse carcasses sent to France.

Borg said EU states had agreed to launch a three-month "systematic"

inspection of animal [DNA testing](#) and to determine the possible presence of the drug.

"We have one of the best food safety systems in the world," he said. "We have the tools to trace any product... in a question of a few hours practically or a few days."

"The physical trail has been established," he said.

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