

France to outlaw controversial food additive this year

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France will forbid the use of a widely used food additive by the end of this year, after studies pointed to potential health risks for consumers, a government official told French daily Le Parisien on Friday.

Brune Poirson, a junior minister in environmental ministry, said the move would remove titanium dioxide nanoparticles from candy, prepared meals and other [food products](#).

"France has already asked the European Commission to take similar measures," Poirson told Le Parisien.

The additive, used mainly as a whitening and brightening agent in candies, chewing gum, white sauces and cake icing, is known as the artificial colour E171 on food labels.

It is also used in sunscreens because of the molecule's ability to reflect ultra-violet rays.

But critics say it offers no nutritional value nor extended shelf life, and could pose a risk to humans since the minuscule particles may be able to pass through protective walls of organs such as the liver, lungs or intestines.

France ordered an inquiry last year after scientists reported that titanium dioxide could cause [precancerous lesions](#) in rats.

Researchers from France and Luxembourg found a 40 percent increase in [precancerous growths](#) in lab rats who had the molecule added to their drinking water for 100 days.

The additive also inhibited the immune systems of the rats and "accelerated" the growth of lesions induced for the experiment, according to France's INRA agricultural research institute, which took part in the study.

The study's authors said that [titanium dioxide](#) was approved in the US in 1966 at levels of no more than one percent of a food product's weight, but that there were no limits regulating daily intake in Europe.

Acting for the Environment, a French association, welcomed the decision while also urging the government to ban E171 from cosmetics and medicines, citing a risk it could be absorbed through the skin.

Many French candy makers have already stopped using the food colorant ahead of expected restrictions on its use.

Carambar and Co. said in February that it had removed E171 from its Malabar chewing gums—beloved by generations of French children—since late last year.

The company was not among nine [food](#) and cosmetic groups targeted in a lawsuit by the French consumer group UFC-Que Choisir in January, accusing them of not disclosing the presence of nanoparticles on labels.

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