

WHO wants data on heavy metals in food

The World Health Organization (WHO) has called for data on two heavy metals in a range of food types.

The first covers methylmercury and total mercury in orange roughy, pink cusk-eel and all toothfish and the second is on lead in cereal-based foods and ready-to-eat meals for infants and young children; dried spices and culinary herbs; eggs; sugars and sugar-based candies. Both have a deadline of Oct. 15, 2021.

New or additional data for mercury in fish should cover the past 12 years. It must be submitted to WHO through the Global Environment Monitoring System (GEMS) database. Data already sent in doesn't need to be resubmitted.

The Codex Committee on Contaminants in Foods met virtually in May and agreed to start work on maximum levels (MLs) for methylmercury in orange roughy and pink cusk-eel and to re-establish an electronic working group led by New Zealand and Canada to develop MLs and associated sampling plans for consideration in the committee's next meeting in 2022. This group will also consider data to establish the feasibility of setting an ML for Patagonian toothfish.

Those with data should provide information on the limit of quantification (LOQ) and limit of detection (LOD) of analytical methods, list if samples are fresh or processed, canned, preserved, or salted, if fish were caught domestically or imported and information from at least two locations in representative fishery areas.

Lead data

The same Codex committee also agreed to establish an electronic working group led by Brazil to establish maximum levels for lead in the foods listed above for consideration at the meeting next year. New data should cover the past 10 years.

Dried spices includes floral parts; bark; rhizomes, bulbs and roots; fresh eggs includes chicken and duck eggs. For sugars, it is white, raw cane and soft brown sugar, honey, syrup and molasses and sugar-based candies covers hard and soft candies, gummy and jelly.

Information should include whether the analyzed food was cooked or raw, if it was analyzed on a dry matter basis or as is and country of origin.