

Exclusive: SBS Radio investigation reveals harmful foods sold in Australia

Imported foods test positive to toxic contaminants

[*Full online investigation here*](#)

An exclusive investigation led by SBS Radio's Punjabi program has revealed Australian consumers face potentially dire long-term health outcomes with revelations some food imports from India contain chemicals including pesticides, arsenic, lead and even the carcinogen DDT.

When listeners started raising concerns about foods purchased, predominantly from South Asian grocery stores, SBS Radio commissioned laboratory testing. Among the most concerning findings were the presence of chemicals in food, which either exceed Australian standards, or are not permitted in foods sold in Australia.

The investigation found the popular Indian spice brand "MDH" contains pesticides above the limit specified by Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ). SBS can also reveal Kohinoor basmati rice contains the banned insecticide Buprofezin.

The examination also revealed deceptive behaviour – including relabelling - and failing to comply with regulations, which meant potentially allowing health-endangering food to hit shelves around the country. In some instances, SBS Radio journalists found use-by dates illegally extended by months - even years.

SBS Punjabi Radio Executive Producer, Manpreet Kaur Singh said: "This investigation exposes potentially harmful contaminants that may be present in foods that Australians consume on the mistaken assumption that all foods sold in the country comply with strict quality standards."

SBS Radio can also reveal that the widely used clarified Asian butter Verka Ghee was found to contain traces of the carcinogenic insecticide DDT. Although within permitted levels set by FSANZ, some experts believe that even consuming a relatively small amount could be harmful.

RMIT Health Sciences Professor Marc Cohen told SBS Radio that chemicals like DDT can have a multi-generational effect on humans, which means pregnant mothers pass it on to their unborn children.

"We have a huge epidemic of reproductive infertility. Two years ago, cancer became the biggest killer on the planet. It overtook heart disease and stroke. This is not an inherent genetic problem. This is an issue of post-industrialisation, the world is exposed to more carcinogens, and cancer is now the most common cause of mortality on the earth.



“It's not just the smoking gun this one chemical causes this one problem - when they're in combination you get a whole host of problems and we all contain a toxic cocktail based on our life history that impacts on our health,” said Professor Cohen.

The Department of Agriculture and Water Resources (DAWR) targets and monitors food determined to pose a high or medium risk to public health. All other foods are considered to be 'surveillance foods'. Surveillance foods are randomly inspected at a rate of 5 per cent of all consignments. Food scientist Dr Kamal Vilkhur says it's simply not enough.

“The number of samples or the number of products being tested is just a handful which does not give any good representation of the results. The testing regime is not up to the standard to pick up the most poisonous or deadly chemicals in those products,” said Dr Vilkhur.

The investigation also reveals that Betel nut, a banned carcinogen seed in Australia, is readily available at some South Asian grocery stores in Melbourne. The Australian Drug Foundation advises that "there is no safe level of drug use" for Betel Nut.

A comprehensive report on the investigation can be found on the SBS World News website - including detailed responses from all stakeholders.

The full online investigation is now available:

[sbs.com.au/yourlanguage/punjabi/en/explainer/dangerous-imported-foods-available-australia](https://www.sbs.com.au/yourlanguage/punjabi/en/explainer/dangerous-imported-foods-available-australia)

Watch the full report on SBS World News Australia at 6.30pm