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REVIEW PAPER

PRIMARY AROMATIC AMINES (PAAS) AS A THREAT TO THE HEALTH OF CONSUMERS*

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ABSTRACT

The article presents the current knowledge regarding the health risks related to the exposure to primary aromatic amines (PAAs), which are found in products designated to come in contact with food. Food safety, including products designated to come in contact with it, is one of the elements of health care policy adopted by the member states of the European Union (EU) in the broad context of public health. Materials either used for packaging or as their own entity, appliances, tableware, kitchenware or other products intended to come in contact with food must meet the requirements outlined in the legal regulations operating in the EU, and in the law of its member states. Diversity of raw materials in products coming in contact with food makes them a causal factor in the contamination of food with substances that are harmful to health. In an attempt to protect food and guaranteeing its safety, the Rapid Alert System for Food and Feed (RASFF) has been established in the EU. This system is used for the exchange of information concerning the hazards detected in food, animal feed, and materials designated for coming in contact with food products. Like food, products that come in contact with it are under official control and the RASFF system. The large-scale use of chemical compounds in the production of articles which come in contact with food entails their significant effect on the safety and health quality of food products. Food contaminated in this manner may have adverse effects on the health of consumers. Health complications may manifest as cancers, congenital disorders, fertility issues as well as damage to the nervous and immune systems. One

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of the groups of chemical compounds identified in products coming in contact with food includes primary aromatic amines (PAAs).

Keywords: primary aromatic amines (PAAs), food contact materials, food, health, migration.

INTRODUCTION

The safety of food products is not just the subject of legal regulations but also the object of supervision from government institutions established for this purpose.

Actions with the purpose of ensuring the safety of food should take into consideration any and every kind of threat at every stage of production so that the final food product and the product designated to come in contact with it are entirely risk-free.

Other than supplying the organism with essential nutrients, food should be of adequate quality in terms of health and, first and foremost, ensure the safety of consumer health (FUNG et al. 2018). It stems from the fact that food has become one of the main routes of people's exposure to foodborne diseases (GODFRAY et al. 2010, FUNG et al. 2018).

Concerns over the safety of food and its potential adverse effects on health arise from a possibility of the contamination of food with chemical substances. This is related to the use of those substances in the stages of cultivation, production, distribution and selling of food. Thus, the aforementioned concerns become a relevant issue for public health.

In the past, the contamination of food and food products by chemical substances was the cause of many poisonings as well as related health problems among food consumers and their progeny (ETO 2000, IKEDA 2004, LI et al. 2013, EL-NEZAMI 2013, SHIMOHATA 2015).

It is estimated that 70% of food is packaged in packages made from plastic, mainly polymers, which have already become familiar (NOWOTYŃSKA et al. 2018). Polymers are regarded as non-toxic substances. Due to their structure, they are classified as macromolecular compounds which do not show the ability to migrate to food. However, it is micromolecular substances that may be a threat to consumer health due to their ability to migrate from packaging material to food (LATOS et al. 2017).

The main aim of packaging designated to come in contact with food is the broadly understood protection of food products. However, instead of ensuring high quality of food products, their packaging is frequently a source of substances harmful to the health of consumers. The risk of migration of toxic substances from the packaging to food is the reason why the materials used in their production are subject to high standards related to ensuring the safety of food. The situation is similar in terms of products coming in contact with food.

Legal regulations applicable in the EU outline the general requirements that must be met by all final materials and products coming in contact with food, with or without print, regardless of the raw material type they were made from. Both materials and products coming in contact with food cannot pose a threat to the health of consumers (Regulation 2004, Commission Regulation 2011).

The EU's integrated food safety policy involves a wide range of activities in the context of public health. In order to ensure the establishment of effective control systems and assessment of compliance with EU norms regarding the safety and quality of food, the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) has been established.

In the EU, the EFSA plays the role of the coordinator of activities taken to counteract arising threats in the area of food safety, and is responsible for the exchange of information between member states, which is necessary for the protection of consumer health (COSTA et al. 2017).

The State Sanitary Inspection (SSI) is the counterpart of the EFSA in Poland in terms of public health activities, in the aspect of supervising health conditions of food and nutrition. The SSI's tasks include supervising the trade of products designated to come in contact with food.

The contamination of food by chemical substances is understood as every form of their migration to food as a result of the processes of production, modification, treatment, preparation, packaging, storage, transport and originating from environmental pollution (CIECIERSKA 2014).

The legislation on both the EU and national levels states that food contact materials (FCMs) made from plastics cannot release primary aromatic amines (PAAs), which are toxic compounds suspected to exhibit cancerogenic properties in humans (Regulation 2004, THE LAW 2006). Substances used in the production of FCMs from plastics are subject to authorization, which includes initial substances and additions (EFSA 2017).

SOURCES OF PAA RELEASE TO FOOD PRODUCTS

According to the literature, the source of PAA release to food products is polyurethane-based adhesives used in the production of multilayer foil used for packaging food, as well as azodyes, which can remain in the final pigments at trace levels and possibly migrate to food products from food packaging with print or tinted with this kind of dye (LAMBERTINI et al. 2014).

PAAs are defined as chemicals having a primary amine ($-NH_2$) attached to an aromatic ring. They range from the simplest aniline to highly complex molecules with conjugated aromatic or heterocyclic structures and multiple substituents (RUBIO et al. 2014).

PAAs include toluenediamines (TDA) and methylenedianilines (MDA), such as 2,4-TDA, 2,6-TDA, 4,4'-MDA, 2,4'-MDA and 2,2'-MDA (SHAHRESTANI et al. 2018).

PAA detection techniques, which are well known, allow for their identification in materials used for food contact.

Numerous studies show that PAA migration from products which come in contact with food (e.g., spatulas, whisks, spoons, kitchenware) to food products may happen as a result of their being left over after the process of their production or dyeing (POÇAS, HOGG 2007, MARCHILDON 2011, McCALL et al. 2012, LAMBERTINI et al. 2014, PASEIRO-CERRATO et al. 2014, RUBIO et al. 2014, SANCHIS et al. 2019).

PAAs are substances contaminating food. Their migration to food may be traced back to coloured plastics, printed paper, kitchen utensils and elastic packaging. One of the sources of PAA release to food is polyurethane adhesives. Many cooking utensils are made of nylon, a material that may incorporate azodyes and PAAs as starting substances (SENDÓN et al. 2010, TRIER et al. 2010, PEZO et al. 2012, MATTAROZZI et al. 2013, CAMPANELLA et al. 2015, SHAHRESTANI et al. 2018).

The relevant literature shows a possibility of a toxicological assay of significant PAAs in items made from plastics and products designated to come in contact with food, including packaging, paper, cardboard and napkins (LI et al. 2013, XIAO et al. 2013, YAVUZ et al. 2016, MERKEL et al. 2018).

PAAs are a group of substances with adverse health effects, which are used in many commercial products, and some of these substances have carcinogenic properties (PEREZ et al. 2014).

According to RASFF data, 25% of the reports in the years 2010-2015 were related to PAAs, a common source of which were polyamide kitchen utensils (SANLLORENTE et al. 2016). In 2003-2021 (as of 23.03.2021), the RASFF system received 434 notifications from various EU countries regarding the migration of PAAs from materials designated to come in contact with food, wherein 25 were recorded in 2014, 18 in 2015, 17 in 2016, 13 in 2017 and 25 in 2018 (PEREZ et al. 2019, European Commission 2021). Table 1 presents the products notified in the period between 17.01.2019 and 30.03.2021 in the warnings issued by the Chief Sanitary Inspectorate (GIS), which is the national representative of ESFA (GIS 2021).

EFFECT OF PAAs ON HEALTH

The negative effect on human health that chemical substances migrating to food from packaging and materials coming in contact with food is the subject of current research (OCHWANOWSKA et al. 2019).

PAAs, e.g.: 4,4'-oxydianiline, 4,4'-methylenedianiline, 2,4-toluenodiamine, 3,3'-dimethylbenzidine, are substances suspected of exhibiting carcinogenic activity in the human body (DOE et al. 1995, PAWLICKA et al. 2015). According to the EU regulations, compounds like these released from materials and plastic products to food or food simulants should not exceed the limit of quantification of 0.02 mg kg⁻¹ (expressed as aniline) (GEUEKE, MUNCKE 2017).

Table 1

Migration of primary aromatic amines from food contact products

Product name	Date of issuing a warning	Producer/Country of origin
Tablespoon P02	04.03.2021	no data
Whisk P02		
Skimmer P02		
Ladle P02		
Spatula for Teflon P02		
Potato smashed P02		
Skimmer – black skimming spoon made of polyamide „Spatel Neberacka”	12.01.2021	Wenzhou Jinzhou Group Intl. Trade Corp. Ltd. Adr: Jinzhou Mansion, Wenzhou Road, Wenzhou China
Ladle	04.01.2021	no data
Skimmer	16.12.2020	no data
Fiskars Functional Form™ Spoon	17.11.2020	no data
Kitchen utensils – spatula	13.10.2020	no data
Teaspoon	04.09.2020	China
Odelo prestige quality line, sella, potato smasher	04.09.2020	China
Skimmer	29.06.2020	China
Skimmer smukee kitchen	26.06.2020	China

The International Agency for Research on Cancer and the World Health Organization (IARC/WHO) have concluded that PAAs are potentially harmful human health, cause cancer and bring about other adverse consequences.

PAAs are regarded as toxic compounds and classified as mutagenic, cancerogenic, or likely cancerogenic factors for people (AZNAR et al. 2009, RIPA et al. 2014, CAMPANELLA et al. 2015, YAVUZ et al. 2016). There are claims in the literature that PAAs showcase genotoxic, cancerogenic and allergenic properties (TRIER et al. 2010, SHAHRESTANI et al. 2018). Moreover, 2,4-toluenediamine (2,4-TDA), which is classified as a PAA, has a toxic effect on spermatogenesis, as well as the production and activity of androgens (THYSEN et al. 1985). Studies carried out on animals exposed to 2,4-toluenediamine (2,4-TDA) showed that it can also be a cancerogenic factor to people (PERSSON et al. 1993, SHANMUNGAM et al. 2001, SIELKEN et al. 2012, RUDEL et al. 2014).

Azodyes, which are used to dye various products which come in contact with food, may contain aromatic amines whose cancerogenic activity is either clinically proven or under debate (AHLSTRÖM et al. 2005). Noteworthy, some azodyes may be extremely toxic and mutagenic (BAFANA et al. 2011).

There is a list shared by the EU countries which includes a register of aromatic amines originating from the breakdown of azodyes whose concentration should be under constant monitoring due to their cancerogenic pro-

Table 2

Amines, their abbreviated name, CAS number, IARC classification group

Amines	Abbreviated name	CAS number	IARC classification group
Benzidine	BNZ	92-87-5	1
2-Naphthylamine	2-NA	91-59-8	1
4-Aminobiphenyl	4-ABP	92-67-1	1
4,4-Methylene-bis-(2-chloroaniline)		101-14-4	1
o-Toluidine	o-T	95-53-4	1
4-Chloro-o-toluidine	4-CoT	95-69-2	2A
4,4-Oxydianiline	4,4-DPE	101-80-4	2B
o-Tolidine		119-93-7	2B
3,3-Dimethylbenzidine	3,3-DMB	119-93-7	2B
p-Chloroaniline	4-CA	106-47-8	2B
2,4-Diaminoanisole		615-05-4	2B
4-Methoxy-m-phenylenediamine	4-M-mPDA	615-05-4	2B
4,4'-Methylene-bis-(2-methylaniline)		838-88-0	2B
4,4-Methylenedi-o-toluidine	4,4-MDoT	838-88-0	2B
4,4'-Thiodianiline	4,4'-thioANL	139-65-1	2B
o-Anisidine	o-ASD	90-04-0	2B
2,4-Toluenediamine	2,4-TDA	95-80-7	2B
4-Methyl-m-phenylenediamine		95-80-7	2B
3,3-Dichlorobenzidine		91-94-1	2B
3,3'-dimethylbenzidine	3,3'-DMB	119-93-7	2B
4,4'-diaminodiphenyl sulfide		139-65-1	2B
p-Aminoazobenzene		60-09-3	2B
o-Aminoazotoluene		97-56-3	2B

IARC classification groups: 1 – carcinogenic to humans; 2A – probably carcinogenic to humans; 2B – possibly carcinogenic to humans.

perties. The detectable amount of those analytes in final products or their dyed elements which come in direct contact with the skin or lips should not exceed 30 ppm (Directive 2002, Commission Regulation 2009).

Table 2 presents a selection of compounds classified as PAAs, which are established as or suspected to be cancerogenic to people (MORTENSEN et al. 2005, AZNAR et al. 2009, LAMBERTINI et al. 2014, PEREZ et al. 2019).

CONCLUSIONS

One of the biggest problems related to the safety of food is the migration of undesirable chemical substances from materials designated to come in contact with food, in particular food packaging.

The production of articles coming in contact with food involves the use of a variety of chemical substances, at the stage of production as well as subsequent processing. Migrating chemical compounds may lead to the pollution and contamination of food.

There is evidence confirming the threat of chemical substance release to food products. If such a product is food itself, migrating chemical compounds may not just cause changes to the smell and taste, but can also lead to the pollution and contamination of the packaged food.

The control and measurement of PAA migration from products and food packaging materials alike are some of the most significant issues of the food sector, especially for producers and food processors. Therefore, even the identification of trace levels of chemical substances from the production process has to be under strict control.

As far as public health is concerned, food safety in the broad sense of the term ought to go beyond the improvement of nutritional profiles, and therefore include regular monitoring, supervision and execution of regulations regarding food products as well as the quality and chemical composition of food contact products with the aim of ameliorating the general welfare and preventing diseases.

Conflict of interest: none declared.

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