

Food imitations

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Note: although the United Kingdom has left the European Union (EU), certain pieces of legislation (formally known as 'retained EU law') will still apply until such time as they are replaced by new UK legislation; this means that you will still see references to EU regulations in our guidance.

This guidance is for England, Scotland and Wales

This guidance focuses on products that look like or imitate food but are not food. It is an offence to provide products that look like food and can cause injury or a health risk because of this.

Laws covering food-imitating products

A number of laws prevent the sale of potentially dangerous food-imitating products:

- Food Imitations (Safety) Regulations 1989
- Regulation (EC) No 1272/2008 *on classification, labelling and packaging of substances and mixtures*
- Regulation (EC) No 1223/2009 *on cosmetic products* (enforced by trading standards in the UK by the Cosmetic Product Enforcement Regulations 2013)

Food Imitations (Safety) Regulations 1989

These Regulations prohibit the marketing, import and manufacture of products that look like foodstuffs but that are not in fact edible. In particular they prohibit the supply of goods that have one or more of the following:

- form
- odour

- colour
- appearance
- packaging
- labelling
- volume

... such that people, particularly children, could confuse them with food and put them in their mouth or suck or swallow, which may cause death or injury.

Injury can include choking, strangulation, cutting, poisoning, or even causing a child to vomit.

Regulation (EC) No 1272/2008 on classification, labelling and packaging of substances and mixtures

Under this Regulation, dangerous preparations such as detergents, drain and oven cleaners, glues, polishes, etc must not be supplied in a shape that:

- attracts the active curiosity of children
- misleads consumers
- looks like packaging for:
 - food (for animals or humans)
 - medicines
 - cosmetics

Regulation (EC) No 1223/2009 on cosmetic products

This Regulation states that a cosmetic product must be safe for human health when used under normal or reasonably foreseeable conditions of use, taking account, in particular, of the following, which should not endanger the health and safety of consumers due to confusion with foodstuffs:

- presentation (and in particular its form, odour, colour, appearance, packaging)
- labelling
- volume
- size

How to assess whether a product is safe






In order to assess whether a product can cause injury or a risk to health, any appropriate designated standards could be used. For example, the EN 71 series of standards covers the safety properties of toys and would be suitable to assess, for example, whether a food imitation releases a small part that could cause a choking hazard or contains a prohibited chemical such as lead or cadmium.

The following are examples of products that have been deemed to be food imitating and could cause injury or harm to health.

Potentially unsafe food-imitation products

Relevant standard(s)	Product	Hazards and examination points
BS EN 71-1: <i>Safety of toys. Mechanical and physical properties</i>	wooden apple	choking hazard toxicity - paints
BS EN 71-3: <i>Safety of toys. Migration of certain elements</i>		
BS EN 71-1: <i>Safety of toys. Mechanical and physical properties</i>	candle	choking hazard
BS EN 71-1: <i>Safety of toys. Mechanical and physical properties</i>	Christmas decoration - polystyrene lollipop	choking hazard
BS EN 71-3: <i>Safety of toys. Migration of certain elements</i>		
BS EN 71-1: <i>Safety of toys. Mechanical and physical properties</i>	decorative 'I Love Chocolate' magnets	choking hazard magnets are easily detached and, because they attract each other, can cause serious damage when passing through the intestine (blockages, perforation of the intestine)



Relevant standard(s)	Product	Hazards and examination points
BS EN 71-3: <i>Safety of toys. Migration of certain elements</i>	naphthalene moth balls	naphthalene may cause irritation, burning and poisoning
		
BS EN 71-1: <i>Safety of toys. Mechanical and physical properties</i>	decorative candle	choking hazard grapes break off
		
BS EN 71-3: <i>Safety of toys. Migration of certain elements</i>	cooling element resembling ice cube bags. The translucent cubes contain distilled water and ethylene glycol	the product poses a chemical risk because the liquid contains ethylene glycol, which can be toxic if swallowed
		
BS EN 71-1: <i>Safety of toys. Mechanical and physical properties</i>	decorative candles	choking hazard
		
BS EN 71-1: <i>Safety of toys. Mechanical and physical properties</i>	Christmas decoration in the form of a cupcake made of expanded polystyrene	choking hazard
BS EN 71-3: <i>Safety of toys. Migration of certain elements</i>		
		

Relevant standard(s)	Product	Hazards and examination points
BS EN 71-1: <i>Safety of toys. Mechanical and physical properties</i> BS EN 71-3: <i>Safety of toys. Migration of certain elements</i>	decorative candle in the shape of a chocolate cake topped with cream and blackberries, packaged in a box with a cardboard base and a clear plastic cover, tied around with a brown ribbon	 choking hazard
BS EN 71-3: <i>Safety of toys. Migration of certain elements</i>	shower and bath gel, wild strawberries	 product's detergent content represents a serious health risk (toxic pneumonia)
BS EN 71-1: <i>Safety of toys. Mechanical and physical properties</i>	lip glosses packed in plastic mini pots in the form of little tarts (chocolate and strawberry sprinkle, cherry feast, violet fancy, etc)	 choking hazard
BS EN 71-1: <i>Safety of toys. Mechanical and physical properties</i>	two fragrant novelty soaps, in the shape of a cake slice, in plastic wrapping	 choking hazard

Trading standards

For more information on the work of trading standards services - and the possible consequences of not abiding by the law - please see ['Trading standards: powers, enforcement and penalties'](#).

In this update

No major changes.

Last reviewed / updated: October 2021

Key legislation

[Food Imitations \(Safety\) Regulations 1989](#)

[Regulation \(EC\) No 1272/2008](#) on classification, labelling and packaging of substances and mixtures

[Regulation \(EC\) No 1223/2009](#) on cosmetic products

[Cosmetic Product Enforcement Regulations 2013](#)

Please note

This information is intended for guidance; only the courts can give an authoritative interpretation of the law.

The guide's 'Key legislation' links often only shows the original version of the legislation, although some amending legislation is linked to separately where it is directly related to the content of a guide. Information on changes to legislation can be found by following the above links and clicking on the 'More Resources' tab.

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