

SA Health Submission on Proposal P274 Minimum Age Labelling of Foods for Infants

Thank you for the opportunity for SA Health to provide comment on Proposal P274.

Standard 2.9.2 provides the compositional and labelling requirements of foods intended and/or represented for use as foods for infants, excluding infant formula products regulated by Standard 2.9.1 – Infant Formula Products.

SA Health supports the proposed draft Standard 2.9.1 providing consistency with the current recommendations in the 2013 Australian *Infant Feeding Guidelines*ⁱ, and the 2008 New Zealand *Infant Feeding Guidelines* which recommend solid food at ‘around 6 months’ of age.

In view of the new *Infant Feeding Guidelines*, SA Health offers the following South Australian data for consideration of how well the guidelines are being followed by the general public. Data from the NOURISH randomised controlled trial and the South Australian Infants Dietary Intake (SAIDI) Study showed that in a sample of 1054 infants, almost 20% were having solids regularly before four months of age. These infants were more likely to be formula fed than receiving any breast milk. An additional 27% had introduced solids regularly before five months of age and a further 41% before six months, making a total of 95% having solids by the age of six months.¹

1. Is the concept and definition of first food a useful way to apply certain labelling and formulation requirements?

Yes, the concept of a ‘first food’ is a useful way to apply certain labelling and formulation requirements, and is consistent with the *Infant Feeding Guidelines*. However SA Health recommends that the proposed definition of first food be modified to include that first foods are complementary foods that complement breastfeeding (or infant formula) at this stage of an infant’s development; e.g. ‘a first food means a **complementary** food for infants that is intended for use in the first stage of weaning an infant’. The *Infant Feeding Guidelines* encourages “...a variety of **complementary** solid foods – fruit, vegetables, meat, fish, poultry, cooked plain tofu and eggs” and “iron fortified infant cereals” as part of its advice to meet the nutritional needs of infants and young children aged 6-24 months.

2. Is the definition of ‘first food’ enforceable?

SA Health recommends that the definition of ‘first food’ is enforceable and applies to foods specifically intended to be a first food, having the appropriate

¹ Magarey, A. Early Feeding Project (NOURISH). Fourth Data Report, November 2011. SA Health.

consistency and formulation, e.g. fruit, vegetables, meat, fish, poultry, cooked plain tofu, eggs and iron fortified infant cereals.

3. Should the use of the age/number 6 on labels of infant food be prohibited, other than in conjunction with the word 'around'?

SA Health recommends that the number 6 on labels of infant food should be prohibited other than in conjunction with the word 'around'. Other uses of 6 such as '6+' or 'from 6 months' could cause consumer confusion. In terms of texture progression in line with developmental feeding stages The *Infant Feeding Guidelines* refer to the following age ranges:

- From [around] 6 months of age, infant should be offered purees and then mashed foods, progressing to minced and chopped foods;
- Most infants are chewing by 7-9 months and can manage finger foods at 8 months.
- by 12 months infants can have nutritious choices from the foods eaten by the rest of the family and should be consuming a wide variety of foods.

These age points could guide industry on labelling other infant foods that differ from first foods in consistency and formulation, and apart from first foods, do not need to use the number 6.

4. Do the changes to the wording of the warning statements change the intent of those statements?

SA Health considers that the proposed modified warning statement 'not before 4 months of age' sounds more definite than the current standard 'not recommended for infants under the age of 4 months' and therefore prefers the wording of the proposed statement. Ideally consumer testing the existing vs modified warning statements with a representative sample of consumers would be undertaken. The option that resonates best for maximum consumer understanding should be the preferred option, rather than deciding on the basis of what is easier for manufacturers to display on their labels.

5. Should the 'not before 4 months of age' statement apply only to first food represented for infants 'around 6 months' of age? If not, please describe which foods should carry this warning statement and the reason why.

SA Health supports a warning statement for infant foods that contain more than 3 g/100kJ of protein, but does not support a warning statement 'not before 4 months of age' to appear on first foods (or any infant food). The statement 'at around 6 months' is self-explanatory; referring to 'not before 4 months of age' creates a grey area. As the FSANZ 2004 consumer research highlighted, this information is viewed as encouragement to introduce solid foods closer to 4 or 5 months of age. This is potentially confusing for the consumer and contrary to the latest *Infant Feeding Guidelines* recommendation to 'introduce solid foods at

around 6 months, to meet the infant's increasing nutritional and developmental needs'. If the warning statement 'not before 4 months of age' goes ahead, then SA Health recommends draft Clause 5A be modified so that the warning is mandatory to appear on the back of infant food products for first foods only (including infant food pouches that may be marketed as first foods from around 6 months) .

Is it important for the minimum age to be always displayed on the front of a product? Please give your reasons. If not, are there any other labelling measures that should be mandated?

SA Health recommends the minimum age must always be displayed on the front of infant foods, and ideally in a consistent location to assist consumers select the correct product for their infant's age and developmental stage across brands and within brands of different consistencies and formulations.

6. Will the removal of the association between the relevant minimum age statement and the under 4-month warning statement reduce the risk of caregiver confusion on the age of introducing solid foods?

SA Health does not support the under 4-months warning statement except for those with greater than 3g/100 kJ protein, for reasons already stated at Q5. If the under 4-month warning statement goes ahead, we recommend this be done on the basis of successful consumer testing with a representative sample of consumers, and ideally it be mandated to only appear only on the back of product.

Additional comments

- The drafting of clause 1 makes it difficult to determine when the provision ceases to have effect because of the number of references to subclauses with references to 'ceases to effect'. Can the drafting be in plainer English?
- By substituting the term "cultures" with "microorganisms" in Clause 2(2)(b) is the intent to provide permission for all microorganisms which would include bacteria, yeasts and moulds that can produce lactic acid or is the intention to provide permission only for lactic acid bacteria cultures?
- Clause 4A is titled – "Additional compositional requirements for a first food" but lists only a qualitative requirement for "consistency" that it be soft and smooth but does not make reference to composition in a manner consistent with this use of this term in other parts of the Code where it is used to describe levels of chemical components or ingredients. The title should be amended to read "Additional consistency requirements for a first food". The first food requirement

to be soft and smooth does not include an quantitative value to determine against or a method to determine whether the first food is in fact soft and smooth.

Suggest a requirement that the food be “pureed” as soft and smooth does not necessarily remove lumps.

- Clause 5 (3)d where honey has been used as an ingredient, the words – “sterilised honey” may require the manufacturer to pre-sterilise the honey before using as an ingredient in a food that may undergo sterilisation post mixing of the honey ingredient into the food. Is this the intent?

References

ⁱ National Health and Medical Research Council (2012) Infant Feeding Guidelines. Canberra: National Health and Medical Research Council.