Sulphur dioxide in meat

Introduction

Sulphur dioxide, a type of sulphite, is a food additive used widely in the food industry as a preservative. It is permitted in a range of foods, however this fact sheet provides information on the use of sulphur dioxide specifically in relation to meat and meat products.

Foods containing sulphites can provoke asthma attacks, severe allergic reactions or gastric irritation. Due to the potential serious health effects of the consumption of sulphur dioxide, its use is strictly controlled by the Australia New Zealand Food Standards Code (the Code). Sulphur dioxide is only permitted in specified meat products, with maximum permitted levels of sulphur dioxide specified.

What meat products are allowed to contain sulphur dioxide?

The Code only permits sulphur dioxide in:

- some processed meat, poultry and game products that are produced using comminuted meats (eg. chopped, diced, etc.)
- mortadella, chicken loaf, frankfurters, luncheon meats, Polish salami, devon and manufactured hams
- raw unprocessed sausage and sausage meat
- sausage, sausage meat and sausage rissoles, chipolatas, BBQ sausages, beef and pork sausages, chicken sausages
- hamburger patties made from sausage meat.

The level of sulphur dioxide permitted in the final product listed above, must not be greater than 500mg/kg.

Sulphur dioxide is not permitted in any other type of meat, including:

- raw minced beef, chicken, lamb etc.
- ‘100% meat’ hamburger patties
- whole sides or cuts of fresh raw meat, game or poultry
- uncooked fermented meat products such as pepperoni, hard Italian salami
- processed (or cured) whole meat cuts such as shoulder or leg ham and silverside
- cured meats such as bacon, prosciutto, pastrami, smoked chicken or turkey (not loaf)
- dried meats such as beef jerky.

How can I find out if a meat product contains sulphur dioxide?

Any food that contains added sulphites in concentrations of 10mg/kg or more must declare the presence on the package label. Where the Code exempts a food product from the food labelling requirements, the declaration may be made on or in connection with the food, or declared to the purchaser upon request.

Where an ingredient list is required on a food label, added sulphur dioxide must be included in the list as an ingredient. The required format for declaration is ‘preservative’, followed by the name or code number of the preservative in brackets. For example, sulphur dioxide must be declared in an ingredient list for a food, in one of the following formats:

- Preservative (sulphur dioxide); or
- Preservative (220).
Food additives have code numbers to assist in the identification of different food additives. The additive code for the identification of sulphur dioxide is 220. The Code defines sulphur dioxide as sulphites including bisulphites and metabisulphites. Therefore, other codes to be aware of include:

- 221 (sodium sulphite)
- 222 (sodium bisulphite)
- 223 (sodium metabisulphite)
- 224 (potassium metabisulphite)
- 225 (potassium sulphite)
- 228 (potassium bisulphite).

For further information

Queensland Health has a variety of fact sheets with detailed information on food safety. Fact sheets can be accessed from the Queensland Health website at [www.health.qld.gov.au/foodsafety](http://www.health.qld.gov.au/foodsafety).

If you have any further questions regarding sulphur dioxide in meat, contact your local Queensland Health Public Health Unit (contact details below).

### Queensland Health Public Health Units

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<tr>
<th>Public Health Unit</th>
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<td>Brisbane Northside</td>
<td>3624 1111</td>
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