



Office of Hon Pete Hodgson
MP for Dunedin North
Minister of Health

- 7 SEP 2007

Dear Dr

Thank you for your email of 14 August 2007 expressing your concerns about aspartame-sweetened diet drinks in schools.

You ask if the Ministry of Health has arranged a contract to put diet soft drinks in schools. Hon Steve Maharey, Minister of Education, and I signed a voluntary agreement between Coca-Cola Amatil NZ and Frucor Beverages Ltd on behalf of the New Zealand Government. This agreement will result in full-sugar soft drinks and full-sugar energy drinks being removed from schools by 2009. However, there are no plans at present to include diet drinks in this contract.

I note your concerns about New Zealand children consuming aspartame-sweetened beverages. The Ministry of Health recommends that the consumption of these beverages be limited to once a term at most. This advice is formalised in the Ministry of Health's Nutrition Guidelines for Healthy Children and Adolescents and the Food and Beverage Classification System. The latter is a practical tool for schools to help them identify foods and drinks that are appropriate for everyday consumption and to be promoted, such as water and milk. Information about the food and beverage classification system can be found on the Ministry of Health's website (www.moh.govt.nz/healthyeatinghealthyaction).

As you know, in New Zealand, food additives (including aspartame) must undergo a safety assessment by Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ) to ensure that they do not present a public health or safety concern to the general population and, particularly, to possible vulnerable subgroups of the population such as children. For further information on food additives, please visit the Food Standards Australia New Zealand website (www.foodstandards.govt.nz).

I am advised that FSANZ has assessed the safety of aspartame and has approved it for use in a range of foods. It is the view of FSANZ, backed by both the UK Food Standards Agency and the European Commission's Scientific Commission on Food, that aspartame is safe.

As you are aware, all food standards and food safety issues are the responsibility of my colleague Hon Annette King, Minister of Food Safety. Your letter will be forwarded to her office for further comment.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Pete Hodgson', with a horizontal line underneath.

Hon Pete Hodgson
Minister of Health

Cc: Hon Annette King
Minister for Food Safety
Parliament Buildings
WELLINGTON

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