

# Caffeine in kids' foods 'dangerous': US regulator

WASHINGTON, USA: The US food and drug regulator has called the addition of caffeine to children's foods like chewing gum and jelly beans "dangerous" and warned of a possible crackdown.

Food and Drug Administration deputy commissioner Michael Taylor said late last week the rise in such caffeine-added products outside the beverage industry was "very disturbing," after candy giant Mars Inc. announced a caffeinated version of its Wrigley gum.

That was added last month to a slew of "high energy" foods on the market sporting substantial added caffeine, including pancake syrups, instant oatmeal, waffles, potato chips, marshmallows and sunflower seeds.

"We believe that some in the food industry are on a dubious, potentially dangerous path," Taylor said on Friday, 3 May 2013, in a comment on the FDA website.

"The gum is just one more unfortunate example of the trend to add caffeine to food."

"One pack of this gum is like having four cups of coffee in your pocket." In late April, Wrigley, the longtime popular chewing gum brand, introduced its Alert Energy Caffeine Gum, saying the product is aimed for adults and "lets people control the amount of caffeine they want on-the-go."

But critics say Wrigley products are generally available on the market to people of all ages.

"Our concern is about caffeine appearing in a range of new products, including ones that may be attractive and readily available to children and adolescents, without careful consideration of their cumulative impact," Taylor said.

Taylor said the FDA has not specifically regulated caffeine use since it first allowed the pick-up to be added to colas in the 1950s.

The rules it has in place, though, "never anticipated the current proliferation of caffeinated products."

In 2010, the FDA moved to block the addition of caffeine in alcoholic beverages, and late last year raised questions about high-caffeine "energy drinks" after several deaths were linked to the consumption of one brand, Monster Energy.

But Taylor said the FDA was especially worried about caffeine added to foods children might easily eat, and was considering whether to place limits on it.

He called on the industry to practice voluntary restraint while the FDA studies the issue.

"We hope this can be a turning point for all to prevent the irresponsible addition of caffeine to food and beverages.

Source: AFP

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