Mac and cheese to dye for?

By ACSH Staff — March 8, 2013

The latest food scare du jour involves an online petition by moms Lisa Leake and Vani Hari of North Carolina asking [1] Kraft to remove Yellow Dyes No. 5 and 6 from their mac and cheese. Artificial food dyes are man-made in a lab with chemicals derived from petroleum (a crude oil product, which also happens to be used in gasoline, diesel fuel, asphalt, and tar), the women write [2]. They cause an increase in hyperactivity in children, have a negative impact on children’s ability to learn and have been linked to long-term health problems like asthma, skin rashes and migraines.

Incredibly, their petition has gotten over 153,000 signatures, as well as significant attention from the mainstream media. (Sadly, none of the stories we’ve read have actually quoted any independent experts on the plausibility of these women’s claims that macaroni and cheese is going to cause migraines or skin rashes or impair children’s ability to learn).

ACSH’s Dr. Elizabeth Whelan says the Food and Drug Administration rigorously tests food dyes and has declared them safe.

ACSH’s Dr. Ruth Kava comments, The genesis of this petition was the observation that some European countries have banned these colorants. That, in turn, was based on a poorly conceived study that examined mixtures of additives, and then asked parents to evaluate their children’s behavior. There is no reason to think that these food dyes are not safe. One might ask if we should ban foods or ingredients based on science or on fear! This petition is certainly one of the latter.