

Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition

Paper for Information: The presence of gluten in baby foods before 6 months

Agenda Item: AOB

Please see attached paper for information.

The following annexes are available from the Secretariat:

Annex 1: Letter from Tamworth Health Centre to SACN Secretariat

Annex 2: Letter from Coeliac UK to Tamworth Health Centre

Annex 3: Letter from the Autism Research Unit, University of Sunderland to
Tamworth Health Centre

Annex 4: Excerpt on Autism from the COT report *Adverse Reactions to Food and
Food Ingredients*

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The presence of gluten in baby foods before 6 months

ISSUE

1. On 8 March 2002 the Tamworth Health Centre wrote to the SACN Secretariat highlighting parent's concerns about the presence of gluten in baby foods before 6 months, particularly regarding the possible link between early exposure to gluten and autism. Tamworth Health Centre has requested that SACN consider this issue and examine whether this practice poses a danger to the health and development of young babies (see annex 1). Relevant correspondence from Coeliac UK and the Autism Research Unit, University of Sunderland is also attached at annexes 2 and 3.

BACKGROUND

2. The 1994 COMA report *Weaning and the Weaning Diet* does not address autism or a link between gluten in baby food and autism. However, the report does make a recommendation relating to gluten in baby food and coeliac disease. The COMA report recommends that "*to prevent coeliac disease the cereals given to infants less than 6 months should preferably be gluten free, such as rice or maize*".
3. The 2000 Committee on Toxicity of Chemicals in Food, Consumer Products and the Environment (COT) report *Adverse Reactions to Food and Food Ingredients* considered evidence on the effects of gluten and gluten free diets on infants with autism (see annex 4).
4. **Members are requested to comment on the letter from Tamworth Health Centre, particularly in light of the COMA recommendation on gluten in infant diets.**