Statements

Lay summary for the Statement on the Risk for T-2 and HT-2 Mycotoxins in Food

This assessment was carried out because new European limits for the mycotoxins T-2 and HT-2 came into force in July 2024, and the Food Standards Agency (FSA) and Food Standards Scotland (FSS) asked the Committee on Toxicity of Chemicals in Food, Consumer Products and the Environment (COT) to review what these changes mean for UK consumers. The previous assessments were based on older, limited data, so the FSA/FSS collected new information from across the cereal supply chain to update understanding of current exposure levels and any potential health risks.

T-2 and HT-2 are naturally occurring toxins produced by certain fungi that can grow on cereal crops, especially oats, under cool and damp conditions. These toxins matter because, at high levels, they can cause health problems in humans such as nausea. To protect consumers, food safety authorities monitor their presence in grains and foods made from grains.

The levels of these toxins in oats can vary greatly from year to year. This variability is mainly due to weather conditions during crop growth where, for example, warm and wet periods followed by dry spells can increase contamination. Because of this, occasional “hot spots” or years with higher levels of T-2 and HT-2 contamination can occur.

The data reviewed for this assessment came mostly from industry and focused on unprocessed oats and oats that had been cleaned and dehulled (processed, but not yet ready-to-eat). Only a small amount of data was available for final ready-to-eat foods like oat porridge or infant cereals.

Cleaning dramatically lowers toxin levels, so measurements from unprocessed oats give an unrealistic picture of what consumers are exposed to. For processed oats and other grains, estimated exposures to T-2 and HT-2 were generally low and not considered a health concern for most people. However, some high-consuming groups, such as infants and toddlers, could occasionally exceed safety guidance values. Some exceedances were observed for ready-to-eat foods and in certain cases these were higher than expected. These findings suggest that some oat-based products may need closer attention.

It’s important to interpret these results with caution. The ready-to-eat food data were very limited – often fewer than five samples per product type – and occurrence data may not represent what is commonly available. In some cases, sampling may have been targeted after suspected contamination rather than being randomly carried out, which adds uncertainty. Seasonal changes and differences in farming practices also mean toxin levels can fluctuate widely.

Overall, while occasional high exposures cannot be ruled out, the limited evidence available does not show signs of a widespread health risk. At the same time, the uncertainties mean that further data are needed to fully understand the situation. Further testing of finished foods would be required to provide a clearer picture.

The full statement is available through the Committee on Toxicity website.

Lay Summary to Statement COT/2026/02