

Petitioner submission of 14 November 2022

PE1919/J: Ban the sale of high caffeine products to children for performance enhancement

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to respond to the Scottish Government submission of 20 October 2022.

The first point the Scottish Government make in the paragraph headed “Current EFSA advice on caffeine” does not deal with fast-release high-dose caffeine gum which is marketed as a sports performance enhancement supplement. According to the [EFSA Scientific Opinion](#) -

“This analysis comprised studies from 1975 to 2004, representing over 200 subjects (74 % men) who were 20 to 35 years of age, ranging from physically active individuals to extremely well-trained elite athletes, and included both habitual caffeine users and non-users (half of the studies did not provide information on coffee use).”

Furthermore, it also states caffeine doses

“... were typically given one hour before the start of the exercise test after a period of caffeine withdrawal.”

The Scottish Government’s response is therefore not an evidence-based response as it would appear the EFSA did not look at the health risks to children taking fast release caffeine gum immediately before or during exercise. I would also highlight the EFSA did not consider the risks to middle aged or elderly athletes taking fast release caffeine gum for performance enhancement.

The Scottish Government’s statement that –

“More generally, we recognise that the evidence-base in relation to caffeine, specifically caffeine gum, continues to develop.”

This is a misleading statement as I believe there are no clinical trials being carried out on the safety of high strength fast release caffeine gum, particularly in the context of children and adolescents, for performance enhancement. The statement distracts attention from the important evidence about the cardiac risks posed by high dose caffeine gum, and contrary to their conclusion it does form a reliable evidence base upon which to assess risk and develop policy. The Scottish Government will also be aware of a further concern for the cardiac health of a cohort of young people particularly those with undiagnosed

heart conditions. The Children's Commissioner highlighted that governments have a duty to protect children from substances harmful to their health. In my opinion it is therefore shocking that the Scottish Government is being so cavalier about its safeguarding responsibilities to children taking part in athletics and sport.

I am astonished the Government's consultation on energy drinks did not include fast release caffeine gum. With all the discussions over the past few years, the consultation group should have been aware that caffeine gum was widely marketed to U18s in athletics, so I would question the statement given in a [Freedom of Information response](#) that "*there is no evidence that young people overconsume caffeine from other caffeinated foods or drinks*".

As I mentioned in an earlier submission, Mark Munro, then Head of Scottish Athletics, repeatedly voiced concerns about the health risks to children and agreed it was "morally and ethically wrong to introduce young (or any) recreational athletes to performance enhancing stimulants" and encouraged me to work with Scottish Athletics going forward to "raise external pressures where appropriate (UK Anti-Doping, UK Athletics, government, media)". Two former board members from Scottish Athletics, including Mark Munro, now hold key positions at UK Athletics, with Ian Beattie currently the Chair of UK Athletics. I had hoped therefore the concerns about fast release caffeine gum would be addressed. This appears not to be the case as I understand UK Athletics endorse it and are happy for athletes, who are role models for young Scottish athletes, to publicise using it before races.

I call on the Petitions Committee to ask UK Athletics the following questions:

- Do they condone the use of performance enhancing stimulants by U18s?
- Have UK Athletics risk assessed fast release caffeine gum for U18s?
- Do UK Athletics know or suspect any athletes may have been harmed using high caffeine supplements for performance enhancement?
- Do UK Athletics agree with the assessment of Cardiac Risk in the Young (CRY) that there needs to be further research on the adverse effects of at-risk groups including U18s?