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BUBBLE TEA UNDER SURVEILLANCE IN GERMANY

Bubble tea was initially invented in the 1980s in the Eastern Asia region and has since become popular in Australia, USA and Europe. Bubble tea is a tea/milk based drink featuring small bubbles or pearls, typically made from starch or alginate, dispersed in the liquid. It is available in a large variety of flavours and quite popular especially with young consumers. Despite its popularity it is critically discussed in German media, NGOs, political parties, and market surveillance regarding its nutritional values¹, choking hazards², and traces of unwanted chemical substances³.

Bubble tea is a beverage which consists of a tea and/or milk basis often fruit flavoured and sweetened as well as containing bubbles on a (typically tapioca) starch or alginate basis. These bubbles are filled with a liquid and consumed with a straw.

Scientists from the Technical University of Aachen (RWTH) in Germany analysed bubble tea samples within a research project in order to look for allergenic substances. During the analysis of the bubbles it became apparent that the products contain chemicals which could be seen as undesired in food. These chemicals are styrene, acetophenone and brominated substances. The source of the contamination is not yet clear, e.g. styrene is used in the plastic industry.

The samples analysed by the scientists derive from one store of a bubble tea chain. It was not published yet if there is a possible risk for the consumers and also there is no data available about the content of the harmful chemicals.

This is not the first report of unwanted chemicals in bubble tea as it has also been in focus during a food scandal in Taiwan where the chemical substance diethylhexyl phthalate (DEHP; a plasticizer) has been used in the production process of an ingredient⁴.



¹ [Trend-Getränk: Grüne machen Stimmung gegen Bubble Tea](#) (in German)

² [Trend Drink Bubble Tea: Health Risk for Small Children](#)

³ [Chemikalien in Bubble Tea gefunden](#) (in German)

⁴ [Taiwanese syrup used in bubble tea found to be DEHP contaminated](#)

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German authorities announced further investigations about the contaminations and an eventual violation of the food law⁵.

Besides the eventual risk from harmful substances the German Federal Institute for Risk Assessment (BfR) has additionally published a warning about a choking risk for children while consuming bubble tea. According to the BfR the bubbles have a size which could lead to aspiration while consumed and consecutive suffocation of the consumer. First accidents have been reported but not yet confirmed by BfR.

SGS is committed to keeping you informed of regulatory news and developments. Leveraging our global network of laboratories and food experts, SGS provides a comprehensive range of food safety and quality solutions including analytical testing, audits, inspections, technical support and food label reviews. We continually invest in our world class testing capabilities and state-of-the-art technology to help you reduce risks, and improve food safety and quality.



⁵ [Staatsanwaltschaft ermittelt im Fall Bubble Tea](#)
(in German)

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