

THE TIMES OF INDIA

Raid finds nearly 100 roadside shops use adulterated tea dust

TNN | Sep 18, 2018, 12.41 AM IST

Trichy: Having a cup of tea from any of the several roadside stalls in Trichy will not be a healthy option as the district food safety officials have found that the use of adulterated tea powder is rampant among them. They claimed that dust tea powder adulterated with aniline dye tartrazine — which is used as a colouring agent — were being supplied to about 100 tea shops in the city.

Health experts have warned that long-term consumption of food products in which tartrazine is added can possibly increase the risk of cancer. This isn't the first time that adulterated tea powder has been confiscated in the district. A few years ago, the food safety wing had cracked down on its use in shops, but it was only in the rural areas of the district. It was by chance that the designated officer (DO) of Trichy food safety department, Dr R Chitra, and other food safety officers came across adulterated tea powder on Monday as they were conducting raids to crack down on the sale of gutka. During the raid, they intercepted a small-time retailer who was carrying dust tea powder packets with him. On testing the tea powder he carried, the food safety department came to know that it was adulterated. When they questioned him further, they found that it was being supplied by a person from Mannarpuram. Without losing time, the officials conducted a raid at the wholesale dealer's house where they found 200 kg of dust tea — estimated at Rs 1.2 lakh — and seized it. The confiscated tea has been sent to Chennai for further testing and legal action would be taken based on the report, officials said .

DO Chitra expressed shock at the prevalence of adulterated tea powder in the city. "Two of them — with the labels of Leeder's Tea and Lion — were found to be adulterated. Drinking adulterated tea is extremely harmful to health and the colouring agent added is also carcinogenic. With such rampant supply of adulterated tea across Trichy it's highly unsafe for people to drink tea from roadside food stalls," she said. Chitra added that further raids would be conducted to ensure that the supply of adulterated tea was curbed.

Dean of Mahatma Gandhi Memorial Government Hospital, Dr G Anitha, said that if a person consumed adulterated tea for a prolonged time, it could lead to several other health effects too. "Right from damage to blood vessels to formation of kidney stones and indigestion, there can be are severe health effects. For that matter, any food product with preservatives or

colouring agents is harmful," she stated. Sources in the food safety department said that the adulterated tea powder was transported from Coimbatore and directly supplied to wholesale dealers, which in turn was sold to tea shops. "The products are not available anywhere in the market in Trichy and are only sold to tea shops at a lesser rate," the source said.

A food safety officer said that the manufacturers had been taking advantage of people demanding "strong tea" at stalls. "Many expect tea to have a strong taste. By adulterating tea with colouring agents, even by adding less powder, a cup of tea is made to look the way the customers demand," the food safety officer added.

Meanwhile, Trichy City Tea Shop Owners Welfare Association organising secretary Ravuther Shah admitted that certain owners were purchasing adulterated tea since they were available at lesser rate. "Currently, a good brand of tea costs Rs 400 a kg while adulterated tea is sold at Rs 150 to Rs 200. In our association meetings, we've been warning the tea shop owners to stop procuring adulterated tea and we're even issuing pamphlets to them regarding this," he said.