

Drug Labels Not Telling The Whole Story

Companies urged to list active ingredients.

Many prescription and over-the-counter drugs contain ingredients which can cause seizures, headaches, bronchospasm and diarrhea. Yet, as serious as these side effects are, the ingredients are not listed on the bottle!

Since they are considered "inactive" ingredients, drug companies can put a wide variety of sweeteners, dyes, coloring agents and preservatives into their drugs and do not list them on the packages.

The FDA has approved nearly 800 of these chemicals, even though almost all of them can cause negative side effects in some people.

The problem is particularly serious when it comes to drugs made and marketed for children, who are often more sensitive to these chemicals.

According to a recent survey of labeling on 102 chewable and liquid pediatric pharmaceuticals, 90% contained sweeteners, 80% contained dyes and coloring agents, and 65% contained preservatives. Most did not detail which sweeteners, dyes or preservatives were used.

Listing the specific ingredients is voluntary, and manufacturers can avoid listing them by saying they are protecting their "trade secrets."

Ironically, when the FDA proposed major drug labeling changes, it made no mention of listing inactive ingredients, even those which might pose health risks to consumers. Instead, the main provision of the proposed regulation merely involves a new label format, going so far as to specify a "bulleted, easier-to-read format," and minimum type sizes and styles.