

English service[Home](#) [News](#) [Program Guide](#) [Ways to Listen](#) [Learn English](#) [Languages](#) [About Us](#)[Subscribe](#) [Podcasts](#) [RSS](#) [Email](#)[Asia Pacific Home](#) | [Broadcast Times](#)

China toxic milk sickens 53,000 babies as scare spreads

[Print](#) [Email](#)

Updated Mon Sep 22, 2008 8:23pm AEST

China's tainted milk scandal has spiralled into uncharted territory, as authorities dramatically revise the number of sick children to 52-thousand and counting. Four babies have died and at least 19-thousand children are sick after drinking milk contaminated by the industrial chemical melamine. Now Chinese families are preparing to launch the biggest class action China has ever seen.

More China Stories:

[Business elite gather in China to discuss economic crisis](#)
[China prepares for first space walk](#)
[China and India not strong enough to weather financial hurricane](#)

*Presenter: Nasya Bahfen**Speakers: Chinese law expert Dr Colin Hawes from the University of Technology Sydney; Dr Hans Troedsson, China Country Director, World Health Organisation.***Listen:** [Windows Media](#)

BAHFEN: As frightened parents queued at hospitals across China, the frightened governments of nine countries including Taiwan, Malaysia, Singapore and Japan banned Chinese milk products. China's health officials say most of the children affected have recovered, but nearly thirteen thousand are still in hospital. The World Health Organisations' China director Dr Hans Troedsson says there should be no extensive side effects.

TROEDSSON: What we understand is that these kidney stones are quite soluble so if they are flushed out by an increased intake of fluids there should be no long-term complications.

BAHFEN: After earlier being critical of China's response to the crisis, the WHO says Beijing is now taking the right direction. Dr Troedsson says food regulation is a work in progress, which the Chinese government appears to be working on.

TROEDSSON: China is now taking this very seriously at a very high political level to try to address these problems. What we see is that they have a new food law, that's under review by the People's Congress which will have more rigorous regulations and strengthening consumer protection as well as an improved monitoring surveillance and inspection system.

BAHFEN: Dr Colin Hawes is an expert in Chinese law from the University of Technology Sydney. He says the new food law was being put together by the Chinese authorities, when the tainted milk crisis hit.

HAWES: They were going to bring in a food safety law but I think it's still in the draft stage. That was kind of left over from some previous problems they've had a couple of years ago. But they haven't quite got that into law yet I don't think.

BAHFEN: Because the food safety law is in the draft stage, Dr Hawes says the Chinese authorities may have to rely on criminal law or China's business rules to prosecute the companies responsible.

HAWES: There is one provision in the PRC company law which says companies have to be socially responsible and to uphold social morality. Premier Wen Jiabao recently was visiting some hospitals and he said some of these companies have obviously not upheld the principles of social morality, so they could use that provision to prosecute these companies.

BAHFEN: There have also been reports of a class action being prepared by Chinese lawyers, on behalf of the families whose children have fallen sick. If true, that would be the largest corporate lawsuit in Chinese history. But Dr Hawes says it won't result in large amounts of damages being paid out.

HAWES: If the companies are state controlled, which certainly some of these big milk producers are, the government might not be too keen to have them paying out huge amounts of damages. It's more likely I think that the courts would pretty much encourage the parties to settle so that the companies would agree to pay out a certain amount of compensation. But it wouldn't be so much that the companies would collapse.