



National

Panera to drop Charged Lemonade after multiple lawsuits

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(NEXSTAR) — Panera Bread is reportedly set to drop its Charged Lemonade drinks, which have been at the center of multiple wrongful death lawsuits.

Panera will be removing the Charged Lemonades in the coming weeks, according to Bloomberg and NBC News. When reached for comment, a company spokesperson told Nexstar via email that the company is leaning into its recent menu changes.

“We are excited to continue the success of our recent menu transformation, which began with our core options of sandwiches and salads. We listened to more than 30,000 guests about what they wanted from Panera, and are focusing next on the broad array of beverages we know our guests desire – ranging from exciting, on-trend flavors, to low sugar and low-cafeine options. Our enhanced beverage portfolio, including new Blueberry Lavender Lemonade, Pomegranate Hibiscus Tea, Citrus Punch and a Tropical Green Smoothie will reinforce our mission of delivering what our guests want most – amazing taste, quality ingredients and value.”

The chain brought Charged Lemonades to its menu in early 2022. The caffeinated drinks came in multiple flavors and were unveiled as Panera rolled out a beverage subscription service. Originally, the drinks were advertised as plant-based, clean, and “with as much caffeine as our Dark Roast coffee.”

However, a large 20-ounce Charged Lemonade was listed as having 390 milligrams of caffeine until last year, when the quantities were lowered to a maximum of 237 milligrams. Panera also added “enhanced” disclosures about the lemonades — which included a warning that the drink is “not recommended for children, people sensitive to caffeine, pregnant or nursing women” — after at least two wrongful death lawsuits were filed against the company over the beverages.

How much caffeine is too much?

In October, the parents of a 21-year-old woman sued Panera, accusing the company of failing to properly warn customers about ingredients in the lemonade. Hours after having a Charged Lemonade in early September 2022, Sarah Katz went into cardiac arrest. She was later pronounced dead at a hospital, where she went into cardiac arrest for a second time.

In December, the family of 46-year-old Dennis Brown of Fleming Island, Florida, sued Panera over his October death. Brown's family says the man drank three of the Charged Lemonades after finishing a work shift and died while walking home.

Brown — who had “a chromosomal deficiency disorder, developmental delay, and ADHD,” as well as high blood pressure, according to his family — did not drink energy drinks. He did, however, enjoy lemonade, and had ordered a Charged Lemonade from Panera multiple times before his death, according to the lawsuit.

Brown's cause of death was ruled to be cardiac arrest due to hypertensive disease, according to a death certificate obtained by NBC News. The lawsuit blames the “unreasonably dangerous and defective design of Panera Charged Lemonade” for Brown's deadly cardiac event.

In a December statement to Nexstar, Panera expressed sympathy for Katz and Brown but said in part that it viewed both claims “to be equally without merit” and that it “stands firmly by the safety of our products.”

In January, a Rhode Island woman sued the company, claiming the Charged Lemonade left her with long-term heart complications. Lauren Skerritt, 28, said she began experiencing episodes of heart palpitations and dizziness after drinking two-and-a-half Charged Lemonades last April, Nexstar's WPRI reports. She was later treated for atrial fibrillation, an irregular, rapid heartbeat that can cause serious complications.

Elizabeth Crawford, who is representing Skerritt and the families of Katz and Brown, told NBC News, “This is exactly what we set out to do, to some extent, is to make sure that this poison is taken off the shelves.”