



St. Lawrence County Public Health Department

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Press Release

Date: February 8, 2023
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Understanding Recent Guidelines for Lead in Baby Food

Recent news articles regarding lead contamination in baby foods may have you concerned about your child's nutritional well-being. Here is a breakdown of the current guidelines and what they mean for your family.

The lead poisoning problem

Lead is a poisonous metal that is especially harmful to young children due to their small size and developing brains. Even low lead exposure can harm children's health and development, specifically the brain and nervous system. Lead is a naturally occurring element and may be present in environments where crops used to make food intended for young children are grown. Recently, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) proposed limits for the amount of lead allowed in baby foods.

What do the new guidelines mean?

Since the 1980s, the FDA has been working to reduce the amount of lead and other environmental contaminants in foods. The latest FDA guidance is aimed at limiting lead concentrations in processed baby foods. The new limits include:

- 10 ppb in fruits, vegetables, and meats packaged in baby food jars, pouches, tubs, and boxes
- 20 ppb for dry cereals
- 20 ppb for root vegetables

*ppb = part per billion. One part per billion is a very small number and can be difficult to put into perspective. To better understand the scale, you can think of it as one dollar out of one billion dollars or as 1 inch in 16,000 miles.

Why is there lead and other heavy metals in baby food?

The reality is that lead, along with other heavy metals, are elements that occur naturally in the earth. Foods such as fruits, vegetables, and grains absorb contaminants, like lead, from the environment the same way that they absorb vital nutrients and minerals. Because lead is naturally occurring, it is not possible to eliminate it entirely from the food supply.

Can lead and heavy metals in baby food harm my child?

There are many other factors that influence healthy brain development in young children. Such factors are genetic, social and environmental. The low levels of heavy metals found in baby foods are likely only a small risk to your child, however, they should still be minimized. The challenge with lead and

many heavy metals is that they accumulate in the body, so over time small amounts can add up. Across the US, the vast majority of lead exposures come from lead-based paint in older homes.

How can I reduce my child's exposure to lead and other toxic metals?

Serve a variety of foods

- Providing a diverse diet can help provide an array of vitamins and nutrients that may offset the damage caused by lead.
- Parents should focus on foods that are high in Iron, Calcium, & Vitamin C.
 - Iron can help protect against the harmful effects of lead and is found in eggs, peanut butter, whole grains, and lean protein.
 - Calcium can make it more difficult for lead to be absorbed in the body and is found in dairy, dried fruits, and almonds.
 - Vitamin C helps the body better absorb iron & calcium and is found in fruits, peppers, and tomatoes.

Read food labels

- Be sure to check the list of ingredients to ensure that baby foods offer the variety they claim. For example, many flavor blends often end up listing sweet potatoes as their first ingredient even though the packaging might advertise a kale/pear or spinach/pumpkin flavor.

Switch up grains

- Rice cereals often contain higher levels of metals than other crops. Try incorporating oats, barley, couscous, quinoa, farro and multi-grain infant cereals.
- Try to avoid foods with rice milk and brown rice syrup.

Avoid fruit juice

- Offer young children fruit slices rather than fruit juice. Many fruit juices, particularly apple and grape, may contain high levels of heavy metals.

Have your water supply tested

- Heavy metals can get into tap water. Test your well for contaminants every 3-5 years.
- Pipes in older homes might contain lead. Have your water tested for free by contacting the Bureau of Water Supply Protection at 518-402-7650 or e-mail FreeWaterTesting@health.ny.gov

Address lead hazards in your home

Lead-based paint was banned in 1978. In St. Lawrence County, nearly 75% of our homes were built before this ban and as a result, many parents may be unaware that their homes contain lead hazards.

Keep your home lead-safe:

- Fix areas with chipped & peeling paint.
- Regularly clean floors, windowsills, and surfaces with a wet cloth or mop.
- Use cold flushed tap water for mixing formula, drinking, or cooking.

- Follow safe practices for removing lead-based paint or hire lead-safe contractors. Find local lead-safe renovators at: [Locate Certified Renovation and Lead Dust Sampling Technician Firms | Lead | US EPA](#)
- If interested, register for a free lead-safe renovation course at: tinyurl.com/LeadRenovator
- Your home may be eligible for free home renovations to reduce lead-hazards. Call the North Country Housing Council at 315-386-8576 to see if you qualify.

Don't smoke or vape

- Smoke from both regular and e-cigarettes may expose children to heavy metals, including lead.

Have your child tested for lead

If you have concerns, talk to your doctor about having your child tested for lead poisoning. All children should be tested for lead at age 1 and again at age 2. The effects of lead poisoning are difficult to detect without a blood lead test.

Further Information:

<https://www.fda.gov/news-events/press-announcements/fda-announces-action-levels-lead-categories-processed-baby-foods>

<https://www.healthychildren.org/English/ages-stages/baby/feeding-nutrition/Pages/Metals-in-Baby-Food.aspx>

<https://www.health.harvard.edu/blog/heavy-metals-in-baby-food-what-parents-should-know-and-do-2021030522088>

<https://www.consumerreports.org/baby-food/baby-food-and-heavy-metals-advice-for-parents-a1523214531/>

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