

# Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) about Lead and Lead-Contaminated Products

## Preguntas Más Frecuentes Sobre Dulces o Caramelos contaminados con plomo

### **What is the health risk from eating candy with unsafe levels of lead?**

Lead exposure is especially dangerous to children and pregnant women. In pregnant women, high levels of exposure may cause premature delivery and poor growth of the fetus. Lead poisoning can harm a child's nervous system and brain when they are still developing, making it difficult to learn, pay attention and perform well in school. Increased lead levels have been associated with behavioral problems.

Lead exposure can cause kidney damage in adults or children. Long-term exposure to lead can result in decreased performance in some tests that measure functions of the nervous system. It may also cause anemia and increases in blood pressure. It can affect fertility, delaying puberty in women and decreasing sperm production in men.

Exposure to very high blood lead levels may cause seizures and death.

### **How does lead get into candy?**

It is not entirely clear where the lead in many of the products is coming from, but products containing tamarind, chili powder or salt that is mined from certain parts of the world may have a higher likelihood of elevated levels of lead. Lead may also be introduced into the candy through improper drying, storing or grinding of the ingredients.

### **Are there types of candy that are more likely to have lead than others?**

Candy containing tamarind, chili powder or salt that is mined from certain parts of the world may have a higher likelihood of having elevated levels of lead. Candies with elevated lead levels appear to primarily be imported from Mexico, Malaysia, China and India.

### **Why does this seem to be a problem with imported candy, rather than candy that is produced in the United States?**

Candies produced domestically are subject to inspection by the California Department of Public Health (CDPH) and the U.S. Food and Drug Administration. These agencies work together to ensure that the ingredients used, and the manufacturing processes employed, produce a product that is safe and unadulterated. Other countries may not be taking this multi-step approach.

### **What is the limit for lead in candy?**

California considers candies with lead levels in excess of 0.10 parts per million to be contaminated.

### **How does the CDPH detect lead in candy?**

CDPH randomly selects the widest variety of candy possible for testing to ensure it is monitoring all of the various candy products sold in California. Staff looks for candies that have not previously been tested to ensure testing is as comprehensive as possible.

### **What happens when CDPH detects lead levels above the limit?**

- CDPH notifies the manufacturer/distributor/importer of the candy of the laboratory results, works with them to initiate a voluntary recall of the affected candy and assists them in drafting notification letters.
- CDPH issues a news release to alert the media and consumers.

- CDPH collects the retail distribution information for the affected candies and ensures that local health departments are informed of the retailers in their jurisdictions that have received the candy, so they can be contacted to ensure it is no longer being sold.
- CDPH shares its testing results with the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, so future imports of contaminated candies can be prevented from entering commerce in the United States unless it can be demonstrated that the problem has been corrected.
- In addition to getting unsafe products off store shelves, CDPH's testing and notification to manufacturers helps them identify problems within their operations, so they can put corrective actions in place to remove lead from their candies and resume sales.
- CDPH's efforts have helped to raise public awareness about the potential presence of lead in candy and other foods, and the overall dangers of lead poisoning.

### **How can you tell if your candy contains lead?**

The only way to know is to have it tested in a laboratory. The [analytical results for all of the candy tested by CDPH](#) are available online. If you think that you may have eaten candy with elevated levels of lead, you should talk with your health care provider.

### **What happens to the candy that has too much lead? What are the manufacturers/distributors supposed to do with it?**

Candy that has been found to contain excess levels of lead is recalled by the manufacturers/distributors so that it is removed from sale and can be properly destroyed. Recalled candy is collected at the warehouse and arrangements are made with the appropriate waste disposal company to take the product to a landfill for destruction.

### **Besides eating lead-contaminated candy, are there other ways people are exposed to lead?**

Yes. In fact, lead exposure from food sources is only one of many possible sources of elevated lead and it accounts for a very small percentage of the lead poisoning cases in California. Exposure to lead is cumulative and may involve more than one source:

- **Homes:** Lead was routinely used in paint before 1978, so older buildings may have lead-based paint on the walls or in the dirt surrounding the structure, if the soil has been contaminated by chipping paint or previous scraping or sanding of the paint. Older homes may also have lead in the plumbing, which is released into the drinking water.
- **Household products:** Lead can also be found on products that may be used in a home, such as imported pottery and ceramics.
- **Food/Cosmetics:** In addition to candies, other food products that may contain lead are certain spices and ethnic foods, such as grasshoppers from Mexico. Traditional cosmetics, ritual substances and some home remedies may contain high levels of lead.
- **Work or hobbies:** People who work with lead (such as in battery recycling, construction and renovation, and radiator repair) may bring lead into the home on their clothes or in their cars. So can people who contact lead through certain hobbies (such as making pottery or stained glass, using lead fishing sinkers, or having contact with ammunition).
- **Soil:** Lead was routinely added to gasoline and released into the air from vehicle exhaust until the mid-1990s. This resulted in lead being deposited in dust and soil, which persists.
- **Industrial:** Some industries emit lead into the air from their factories.

### **What can I do to prevent lead poisoning and elevated blood lead levels?**

California regulations to prevent childhood lead poisoning require that, for all children, the child's health care provider give anticipatory guidance to prevent lead exposure at every periodic health assessment from age 6 months to 6 years. Blood lead testing is required at 12 and 24 months for children enrolled in publicly supported programs, such as Medi-Cal, Child Health and Disability Prevention, Special Supplemental Nutrition Program

for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) and Head Start. Blood lead testing is also required for other children considered at increased risk for lead exposure.

Because young children often put their hands and toys in their mouths, their hands and toys should be cleaned frequently. This can prevent the transfer of lead from the environment into their mouths. In addition, maintaining a good diet high in iron, calcium and vitamin C reduces lead absorption by the child's body.

**Where can I get more information about lead poisoning and prevention?**

The California Department of Public Health [Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Branch](#) (CLPPB) website has more information about the effects of lead, prevention of lead exposure, blood lead testing/screening and local, state-supported childhood lead poisoning prevention programs. The CLPPB and local programs work to prevent lead exposure, and see that the children exposed to lead are identified and receive appropriate services.

Here are some additional resources:

- [Publications about the health effects of lead, prevention of childhood lead exposure, and blood lead testing](#)
- [Contact information for local childhood lead poisoning prevention programs in California](#)

The CLPPB includes the [Lead-Related Construction Program](#) (LRC), which trains and certifies construction professionals on how to identify and safely eliminate lead hazards in homes and public buildings, so children, families and the construction workers themselves are not exposed to lead hazards.

The CDPH [Occupational Lead Poisoning Prevention Program](#) works to prevent lead exposure in the workplace, help workers avoid accidentally bringing lead home to their families, identify lead-poisoned workers, and find services for those who are poisoned.