

Heavy Metals in Infant Foods

NOVEMBER 24, 2021

Media attention has drawn awareness to the concern over the presence of toxic heavy metals in popular baby food brands, including those provided by WIC. Your agency may receive questions regarding this issue and we wanted to share the information the National WIC Association (NWA) provided.

NWA and WIC providers are partners in the broader efforts to assure safe options on grocery store shelves, hold manufacturers accountable for the quality of their products, and deliver safe, healthy, and proper nutrition for infants and young children. NWA has monitored and elevated growing concerns about heavy metals in jarred infant foods since 2018.

Talking points for WIC staff

- Heavy metals like arsenic, lead, cadmium, and mercury permeate the entire food supply because they occur naturally in soil, water, and/or air. Pollution can also affect the soil and water used to grow food. Metals may get into food during manufacturing and processing.
- As a result, they are found in many foods and beverages consumed by all Americans, not just infant foods that are provided through WIC.
- Consistent with guidance from the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), WIC providers recommend serving a variety of nutrient-dense food to children as an effective strategy to minimize heavy metal exposure.

Feeding approaches to address heavy metals

- Parents should serve a wide variety of fruits and vegetables that include carrots, sweet potatoes, and other choices.
- Iron fortified cereals are an important dietary component for infants beginning solids. Iron sources found in infant meats and iron fortified cereal are critical for brain development. There are many types of infant cereal available from WIC, especially if rice is a concern.
- The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends giving no juice before 1 year and limiting quantities provided to children. For babies 6 months and older, provide only breastmilk or formula, and water to drink.
- Avoid higher risk foods with limited nutrition value such as snacks and puffs made from rice flour and teething biscuits.
- Parents are encouraged to contact their local WIC clinic to learn more about infant feeding recommendations.

Environmental steps families can take to reduce exposure to heavy metals

- Address lead hazards in the home. Peeling or chipping paint from older homes is the most common source of lead exposure.

- Check their water source. Heavy metals can get into tap water or contaminate well water, and older pipes may contain lead. Encourage them to contact their local health department to have their water tested if this is a concern.
- Don't smoke or vape. Secondhand and thirdhand smoke from both regular and ecigarettes can expose children to heavy metals.

National actions

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) launched [Closer to Zero: Action Plan for Baby Foods](#) to develop action targets for industry stakeholders to reduce heavy metals in infant foods.

- NWA and the WIC community have been active partners in this effort, having joined with the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics (AND) to urge the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) to coordinate more closely with FDA's regulatory, oversight, and enforcement efforts.
- NWA maintains that FDA should act expeditiously to articulate science-based action targets that will direct industry testing and FDA enforcement.

WIC prescribes healthy foods for participants to support their nutrient intake and health outcomes, but when it comes to resolving environmental toxins in the food supply chain, WIC is one piece of the puzzle. If certain infant foods are unsafe for WIC families, they are unsafe for all families and should be recalled from general circulation. The WIC community is a ready partner in the broader effort to hold manufacturers and retailers accountable for product that is on the shelf.

Resources

[Heavy Metals in Baby Food](#) – American Academy of Pediatrics

[WIC Infant Nutrition and Feeding](#) – USDA, see page 202+

[What's in my baby's food?](#) – Healthy Babies Bright Futures

Reference – Complete Listing of Hyperlinks

[Closer to Zero: Action Plan for Baby Foods](https://www.fda.gov/food/metals-and-your-food/closer-zero-action-plan-baby-foods?eType=EmailBlastContent&eld=fefec597-2f23-4e30-bba7-dfed8179767d) (https://www.fda.gov/food/metals-and-your-food/closer-zero-action-plan-baby-foods?eType=EmailBlastContent&eld=fefec597-2f23-4e30-bba7-dfed8179767d)

[Heavy Metals in Baby Food](https://www.healthychildren.org/English/ages-stages/baby/feeding-nutrition/Pages/Metals-in-Baby-Food.aspx) (https://www.healthychildren.org/English/ages-stages/baby/feeding-nutrition/Pages/Metals-in-Baby-Food.aspx)

[WIC Infant Nutrition and Feeding](https://wicworks.fns.usda.gov/resources/infant-nutrition-and-feeding-guide) (https://wicworks.fns.usda.gov/resources/infant-nutrition-and-feeding-guide)

[What's in my baby's food?](https://www.healthybabyfood.org/sites/healthybabyfoods.org/files/2019-10/BabyFoodReport_FULLREPORT_ENGLISH_R5b.pdf) (https://www.healthybabyfood.org/sites/healthybabyfoods.org/files/2019-10/BabyFoodReport_FULLREPORT_ENGLISH_R5b.pdf)

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