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Study: Lead found in 20% of baby food samples

by Melissa Jenco, News Content Editor

Roughly 20% of baby food samples were found to contain lead, more than other foods, according to a new report.

The Environmental Defense Fund (EDF), which authored the [study](#), is calling for federal authorities and manufacturers to lower the amount of lead in food. In the meantime, Academy experts recommend that children eat a variety of foods, stick to proper serving sizes and limit exposure to other sources of lead.

"Every child's food should come unleaded," EDF Health Program Vice President Sarah Vogel said in a statement. "Unfortunately, food is a poorly understood and often overlooked source of lead exposure, a potent neurotoxin. Our report should serve as a call to action for government and business alike to better protect children."

Lead exposure has been associated with health, learning and behavior problems, and no amount is considered safe. To study lead intake in food, the EDF analyzed data from the Food and Drug Administration's (FDA's) [Total Diet Study data](#) from 2003-2013. It found lead in 20% of the 2,164 baby food samples and 14% of the 10,064 other food samples. Among the 57 types of baby food analyzed, 52 had lead in at least one sample. Specific brands were not identified.

Fruit juices were a major culprit, with lead in 89% of grape juice, 67% of mixed fruit juice, 55% of apple juice and 45% of pear juice samples. Researchers found lead in baby versions of apple and grape juices more often than regular versions.

Among other baby food types, root vegetables had lead in 65% of samples and baby food carrots had lead more often than regular carrots. Lead also was found in 47% of crackers and cookies, 29% of fruits including juices and 4% of cereals.

The lead may be coming from the soil or from processing, but more research is needed, according to the EDF.

The FDA recommends young children do not consume more than 6 µg/day of lead, a standard dating back to 1993. More than 1 million young children are estimated to exceed that limit, according to Environmental Protection Agency data in the report.

The EDF is calling for the FDA to update these standards as well as limits on lead in food and juices and to enforce them accordingly. It also is asking manufacturers to minimize lead in baby food and test frequently. For parents, the EDF recommended consulting with their pediatrician and asking food manufacturers about their food safety standards.

AAP experts agree federal standards need to be updated.

"I think the onus is really on FDA and industry to change their standards to reflect what we know, that there is no safe lead level," said Jennifer A. Lowry, M.D., FAAP, chair of the AAP Council on Environmental Health Executive Committee. "These are old standards they currently have and they haven't been updated in decades."

Dr. Lowry and Academy nutrition experts recommend children eat a variety of fruits and vegetables to minimize risks from a single food. They also should adhere to recommended serving sizes. The Academy recently released new [limits on fruit juice](#) consumption that say children under 1 year should not drink juice and older children's intake should be minimal.



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"Pediatricians can help parents understand this issue and use AAP guidance to build a healthy diet for children and limit exposure to lead from different sources," said Stephen R. Daniels, M.D., Ph.D., FAAP, chair of the AAP Committee on Nutrition.

These other sources may include paint, dust, cosmetics, water, soil, some toys, and certain hobbies and occupations. Pediatricians should ask families regularly about potential lead exposure and follow up with appropriate testing and resources as detailed in the AAP policy *Prevention of Childhood Lead Toxicity*.

Resources

- [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#)
- [FDA Q&A on lead in food](#)
- [AAP News Parent Plus article "Prevention is best protection against childhood lead poisoning"](#)
- [Information for parents on HealthyChildren.org on protecting children from lead exposure](#)
- [AAP News story "FDA: Blood lead tests may have been inaccurate"](#)