

memo

DATE: November 24, 2021
TO: WIC Coordinators
FROM: State WIC Staff
SUBJECT: Heavy Metals in Infant Foods – Recent Media Attention

Recent media attention is drawing awareness once again to the concern over the presence of toxic heavy metals in popular baby food brands, including those provided by WIC. Your agency may be receiving phone calls or fielding questions regarding this issue and we wanted to share the information the National WIC Association (NWA) provided.

In addition to the guidance below from NWA, earlier this year we provided some guidance on feeding approaches and steps families can take to reduce exposure to heavy metals in a Wednesday Update Memo [Heavy Metals in Infant Foods](#).

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.
- 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. Refer to [Heavy Metal in Baby Food](#) for more information.
- Parents are encouraged to contact their local WIC clinic to learn more about infant feeding recommendations.
- Earlier this year, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) launched its [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.

While FDA continues to develop industry-wide standards, there is further action that USDA-FNS can take. WIC benefits for infants aged six to twelve months are issued jarred infant food options with few opportunities for substitution. In 2017, the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (NASEM) recommended more robust substitutions to accommodate parents and infants who may seek critical nutrients in other forms – including fresh vegetables and fruits or canned fish. USDA has announced a forthcoming rulemaking, but until that process begins, State WIC Agencies are limited in the options that can be provided. Earlier this month, NWA joined with the AAP, AND, and other national organizations to encourage science-based revisions to the WIC food package. A copy of the letter, [org letter on WIC food package rule](#) outlines the concerns of the various organizations.

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.

Reference – Complete Listing of Hyperlinks

[Heavy Metals in Infant Foods](#)

(<https://www.health.state.mn.us/docs/people/wic/localagency/wedupdate/2021/topic/0210metals.pdf>)

[Heavy Metal in Baby Food](#) (<https://www.healthychildren.org/English/ages-stages/baby/feeding-nutrition/Pages/Metals-in-Baby-Food.aspx?eType=EmailBlastContent&eld=fefec597-2f23-4e30-bba7-dfed8179767d>)

[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>)

[Org Letter on WIC Food Package Rule](#) (<https://s3.amazonaws.com/aws.upl/nwica.org/org-letter-on-wic-food-package-rule.pdf?eType=EmailBlastContent&eld=fefec597-2f23-4e30-bba7-dfed8179767d>)

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