

CHILD SAFETY BLOG

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Unusual Sources of Lead Poisoning for Parents to Watch Out For

January 2, 2012 by *Patrick A. Malone*

Although significant strides have been made toward eliminating the threat of lead poisoning, the [National Capital Poison Center](#) points out that it is still a problem, especially for children.

Symptoms of lead poisoning can range from the relatively mild—abdominal discomfort—to the dire—seizures, coma and death. Children exposed to too much lead also can have lower IQ scores, difficulty with reading and math and behavioral problems including attention deficit disorders and delinquency.

Because some sources of the deadly metal are unexpected, the Poison Center has enumerated certain products for which parents should be especially watchful. They are:

- **Jewelry and Cosmetics.** Some imported cosmetics have been contaminated with lead, including kohl (used as eye liner) and sindoor (a red scalp powder).

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- **Imported medicines, traditional medicines and folk remedies.** *Azarcon* and *greta* are used to treat *empacho* (stomach symptoms); both contain a substantial amount of lead. In one study, 64 percent of herbal medicines from India contained lead, which also shows up in folk remedies for arthritis, infertility, cramps and colic. Contaminated medicines might have been imported, or purchased overseas and brought into the U.S. by consumers.
- **Imported food and candy.** Tamarind candy and candy wrappers from Mexico have been contaminated with lead. Several spices and food products imported from India have been contaminated with lead.
- **Bullets, lead pellets and hobby items.** Licking bullets, swallowing lead pellets or shot or breathing fumes from melted lead for fishing weights can cause lead poisoning.
- **Household items.** Children have been poisoned by lead when acidic foods were stored or served on imported ceramic dishware and pitchers—acid promotes the leaching of lead from the ceramic glaze into the food. Lead poisoning has resulted from contaminated plastic mini-blinds. Curtain weights may contain lead. Antique cribs and furniture may be sources of lead-based paint.

Any lead is too much lead: There is no “normal” blood level. Children with lead exposure often complain of stomach pain, are fussy, can’t concentrate and have diminished appetite. The only way to diagnose lead poisoning is by a blood test.

To minimize the chances of your child being exposed to lead:

- Do not purchase inexpensive metal jewelry for children. In addition to lead, some also contain the **toxic metal cadmium**.
- Verify the source and safety of imported cosmetics and medicines, especially traditional and folk medicines, or don’t use them.
- Don’t allow children to lick or suck on hobby materials including bullets, pellets, fishing sinkers.
- Do not use imported ceramic plates, pitchers, etc. to store or serve food. Use them for decoration only.
- Replace old, plastic mini-blinds.

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- If you live in a building constructed before the 1980s, consider having the paint tested for lead content, and also consider getting free lead blood screening tests for any children in the house. Here is more [information from the U.S. Consumer Products Safety Commission on lead in housing](#).

To address concerns or questions about lead or the treatment of lead poisoning, call 800-222-1222. Local poison center experts answer phone call 24 hours a day.

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