



# News Release

For immediate release: June 29, 2005

(05-080)

Contacts: Eric Ossiander, Epidemiology  
Deanna Whitman, Communications Office

360-236-4252  
360-236-4022

## **Health officials warn of lead contamination in some imported candy and pottery**

**OLYMPIA** — The state Department of Health is warning residents that excessive amounts of lead have been found in candy and handmade pottery from Mexico. People should avoid eating imported candy that contains tamarind or chili and should avoid storing or cooking food in traditional, handmade pottery from Mexico.

“Exposure to lead can be poisonous to humans; especially infants, young children and developing fetuses,” said Dr. Juliet VanEenwyk, state epidemiologist for non-infectious conditions. “Children are more susceptible to lead poisoning because their bodies absorb more lead, and their brains and bodies are still developing. Lead poisoning can result in lifelong learning disabilities and behavioral disorders.”

The Department of Health tested many different brands of candy containing tamarind or chili from both Mexico and Southeast Asia after learning lead-contaminated candy from Mexico was found in other states. Candy was purchased from stores throughout Washington; about half of the samples exceeded the Food Chemical Codex specification for lead in sugar.

“We found lead contamination in various brands,” said Dr. VanEenwyk. “We are warning people to avoid all imported candy that contains tamarind or chili.”

The FDA does not have a fixed standard for the amount of lead allowed in candy although they can prohibit the importation of candy if there is presumptive evidence that it is unsafe. Currently, the FDA prohibits candy if it has 0.5 parts per million lead, or if they estimate that a child eating

Lead poisoning

June 29, 2005

Page 2

the candy will consume more than 6 micrograms of lead — the recommended daily maximum allowance of lead for children.

A new FDA rule setting specific limits for lead in candy is expected soon. However, much of the candy from Mexico may be imported in small shipments, which the FDA does not inspect.

The Department of Health also tested 58 samples of traditional terra cotta pottery that was made in Mexico. The pottery was found in stores in both eastern and western Washington. Most of the pieces were stamped “not safe for food use,” but some were stamped, “lead-free, safe for food use.” Unsafe levels of lead were found in 47 of the 58 items, including one of the pieces stamped as lead-free. One piece contained 3,000 times the amount of lead the FDA considers to be safe. Traditional Mexican pottery should be used only as decoration, never to store or cook food.

Information on [lead poisoning](#) is available on the Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Program Web site (<http://www.doh.wa.gov/EHSPHL/Epidemiology/NICE/Lead/default.htm>) or by calling 1-800-909-9898.

###

Visit the Washington Department of Health Web site at <http://www.doh.wa.gov> for *a healthy dose of information*.