

STATE OF CONNECTICUT

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

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Environmental Health Section

EHS Circular Letter #2012-28

To: Local Health Directors and Chief Sanitarians

From: Francesca Provenzano, Health Program Supervisor
Lead and Healthy Homes Program

Date: May 8, 2012

Subject: Lead in Spices

The Connecticut Department of Public Health, Lead and Healthy Homes Program (LHHP) would like to make you aware of an investigation recently conducted by a local health department (LHD) in collaboration with the LHHP, and the Department of Consumer Protection (DCP). During the LHD's investigation of a childhood lead poisoning case, no environmental lead hazards were found at the child's home. However, spices were identified as a potential source of lead exposure, and the LHD collected and analyzed a common Indian spice known as Asafoetida. Lab results indicated the sample of Asafoetida taken from the child's home contained 31.2 ppm of lead. The brand name of the Asafoetida was LG, manufactured by Laljee Godhoo & Co., Mumbai, India.

The LHD in collaboration with the DCP and LHHP, collected six samples of Asafoetida powder which included one sample from the lead poisoned child's home, three samples from the store where the child's family purchased the spice, and two from an Asian grocer in a neighboring town. In summary, two different brands and lot numbers of Asafoetida were tested. The sample results ranged from 0.072ppm - 31.2 ppm.

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA), which oversees the safety of food products imported into the U.S. does not have specific guidelines for screening lead in dried products like spices. As a result, the FDA has not set a recommended maximum lead limit for spices or developed regulations to remove lead contaminated products from retail sale.

However, it's common knowledge that there is no safe level of lead in food. As such, if you are conducting an epidemiological investigation as the result of a childhood lead poisoning case and there are no common environmental lead hazard sources found on the property, you should consider imported spices, home remedies, medicines/supplements, Ayurvedic products, and



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cosmetics as other potential sources of lead exposure. Samples of these products should be collected and submitted to a laboratory for analysis. We advise LHDs to work with the LHHP and the DCP to remove food that is suspected or confirmed as contaminated from retail sales on a case-by-case basis. A director of health may utilize Connecticut General Statutes sections 19a-206 and 19a-101 for this purpose.

If you have any additional questions regarding ethnic remedies and other sources of lead exposure, please contact your regional lead case manager. Laboratory analysis questions can be directed to the DPH laboratory.

cc: Suzanne Blancaflor, M.S., M.P.H. Chief, Environmental Health Section
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