



New Report Reveals Toxic Arsenic Levels in Infant Rice Cereals are Six Times Higher than in Other Infant Cereals

**Scientists, Health Professionals and Advocates Call for
Immediate Action by FDA and Cereal Manufacturers**

Parents Urged to Choose Safer Alternatives to Rice Cereals

DECEMBER 7, 2017—In [the first-ever testing](#) of new infant cereals, [Healthy Babies Bright Futures](#) (HBBF) and its partner organizations today report that toxic arsenic levels found in infant rice cereals are six times higher than in other infant cereals. Scientists, health professionals and advocates call for immediate action by FDA and cereal manufacturers to help protect children from unnecessary arsenic exposures. Parents are urged to choose safer alternatives to infant rice cereals.

The study tested 105 cereals covering a wide range of cereal types and brands, including Gerber, Earth's Best, and Beech-Nut. Over the last four years, cereal manufacturers have decreased arsenic levels in their infant rice cereals on average from 103 parts per billion (ppb) to 85 ppb. However, this decrease is NOT enough to protect infants.

Arsenic is known to cause cancer in humans, but also poses risks to the developing brain. It has been linked to permanent IQ loss for children exposed in utero or during the first years of life. Rice absorbs and concentrates 10 times more arsenic from the environment than other cereal grains. Infant rice cereal is the top dietary source of arsenic for babies under the age of one. HBBF tested all cereals in the study for inorganic arsenic, the contaminant's most toxic form.

“A growing body of research points to the potential for arsenic to cause adverse health effects at low levels. The public health implications of arsenic contamination in food and water, particularly foods like infant rice cereals and other commonly consumed rice products early in life, raise serious concerns,” said Dr. Margaret Karagas, Chair of the Department of Epidemiology, Geisel School of Medicine at Dartmouth.

The harm to health is considerable: Arsenic in infant rice cereal and other rice-based foods accounts for an estimated loss of up to 9.2 million IQ points among U.S. children ages 0-6, [according to a new analysis](#) by Abt Associates commissioned by HBBF. This damage costs the country an estimated \$12-18 billion annually in lost wages.

“Babies eat infant cereal a time in life when the brain is intensely sensitive to harm, making arsenic in infant rice cereal uniquely risky. But cereal companies can fix this problem. We are calling on manufacturers to reduce arsenic levels in their rice cereals to

the same low levels we found in other cereals,” says Jane Houlihan, study author and HBBF’s National Director of Science and Health.

With 84 percent less arsenic in non-rice and multi-grain cereals than in infant rice cereal, choosing alternative non-rice cereals is an effective and immediate action that parents can take to lower their baby’s arsenic exposures. The study found significantly lower arsenic levels in infant oatmeal, mixed grain, quinoa, barley, buckwheat, and wheat cereals, making each a safer alternative to rice cereal.

“Arsenic is a carcinogen and a known cause of infant brain damage. Exposures in early life are especially dangerous,” explains Dr. Philip J. Landrigan from Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai. “I urge parents to avoid feeding rice cereal to your babies. There are many other good, nutritious and affordable cereal products on the market. I encourage you to use these alternatives until this problem is fixed.”

Arsenic is strictly regulated in drinking water, but is legal in any amount in infant rice cereal. In 2016, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) proposed an action level targeting high arsenic levels in infant rice cereal. However, to date, the FDA has not taken further action on finalizing this level.

“As a pediatrician, I find it intolerable that in 2017 we still have arsenic in widely used brands of infant rice cereal. The Food and Drug Administration and the cereal manufacturers need to correct this problem immediately— with no further delay,” says Dr. Landrigan.

HBBF’s partners on this research project include [Alaska Community Action on Toxics](#), [Campaign for Healthier Solutions](#), [Center for Environmental Health](#), [Clean & Healthy New York](#), [Coming Clean](#), [Conservation Minnesota](#), [Getting Ready for Baby](#), [Learning Disabilities Association of America](#) and [Toxic-Free Future](#).

To learn more, visit www.HealthyBabyCereals.org.



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[Healthy Babies Bright Futures](#) (HBBF) is an alliance of scientists, nonprofit organizations and donors working to create and support initiatives that measurably reduce exposures to neurotoxic chemicals in the first thousand days of development. Our efforts are inspired and supported by science and data, and designed to help restore the chance for a full life to children who would otherwise face brain-diminishing exposures to toxic chemicals beginning in utero. www.hbbf.org

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MEDIA CONTACT

Stephanie Stohler
Communications Manager
[Healthy Babies Bright Futures](#)
sstohler@hbbf.org | 617-842-4751