



## **New Report Finds Arsenic, Lead and Other Toxic Contaminants in 95% of Baby Foods Tested**

**Higher Risk Foods for a Baby's Developing Brain include  
Rice-Based Foods, Sweet Potatoes and Fruit Juices**

**No Federal Safety Limit Exists for  
Toxics Found in 9 out of 10 Foods Tested**

**OCTOBER 17, 2019**—In a [new investigation](#) released today, [Healthy Babies Bright Futures](#) (HBBF) and its partner organizations report that 95% of baby foods tested contain one or more toxic chemicals, including lead, arsenic, mercury and cadmium. One-quarter of foods tested contain all four toxic chemicals tested by the lab, all of which are heavy metals that can affect brain development.

HBBF's tests uncovered notably high levels of heavy metals in some containers. Four of seven infant rice cereals tested in this study contained inorganic arsenic (the toxic form of arsenic) in excess of FDA's proposed action level of 100 parts per billion (ppb). Eighty-three percent of baby foods tested had more lead than the 1-ppb limit endorsed by public health advocates, and one of every five foods tested had over 10 times that amount.

Decades of scientific research show that low levels of exposure to these heavy metals harm children's developing brains with impacts that include IQ loss and other learning and attention deficits. Testing uncovered higher risk foods for neurotoxic harm to be rice-based products, sweet potatoes and fruit juices: safer alternatives are easily accessible and identified in the report. There is no federal safety limit for toxic heavy metals in nearly 9 out of 10 foods tested.

The study tested 168 baby foods spanning 61 brands and found that 95% of baby foods tested are contaminated with one or more of four toxic heavy metals—arsenic, lead, cadmium and mercury. All but nine of the 168 tested baby foods contained at least one of these four toxic metals. And 87% of foods tested contained more than one toxic heavy metal. All four toxic heavy metals were detected in one out of every four foods tested.

[Scientific evidence](#) confirms that arsenic, lead, cadmium and mercury are neurotoxic, negatively impacting a child's healthy brain development. The report cites 23 peer-reviewed studies published in the past seven years that show loss of IQ, attention deficits and other learning and behavioral impacts among children who are exposed. Also, three of the metals (arsenic, lead and cadmium) are human carcinogens.

“Arsenic, lead and other heavy metals are known causes of neurodevelopmental harm,” explains Dr. Philip Landrigan, a pediatrician and Director of the Program in Global Public Health and the Common Good in the Schiller Institute for Integrated Science and Society at Boston College. “Low level exposures add up, and exposures in early life are especially dangerous. The cumulative impact of exposures is what makes this a significant concern that demands action.”

According to a new analysis by Abt Associates commissioned by HBBF using federal data of national surveys of food contamination and consumption, American children age 0 to 24 months collectively lose more than 11 million IQ points from exposure to arsenic and lead in food, with rice-based foods accounting for one-fifth of this loss. Fifteen foods account for over half of the total estimated IQ loss.

HBBF used the Abt analysis, baby food test results, and FDA market basket studies to identify which baby foods pose the highest risk to brain development while also offering easily accessible safer alternatives. These safer alternatives have 80% lower levels of toxic heavy metals, on average, than the riskier foods. The results point to five baby foods with higher risk, which include rice-based snacks/meals (puffs snacks, teething biscuits, rice rusks, and infant rice cereal), carrots, sweet potatoes and fruit juices.

Safer alternatives to higher risk foods include rice-free snacks, non-rice cereal (such as multi-grain and oatmeal cereals), other soothing foods for teething (like a frozen banana or chilled cucumber) and serving a variety of vegetables. Organic standards do not address these contaminants, and foods beyond the baby food aisle are equally affected. Parents can find more details about safer alternatives in HBBF's [safer baby foods fact sheet](#).

Data from the study shows that when FDA has issued a draft guidance or standard, levels have noticeably decreased over time. Despite the evidence that FDA actions can inspire market-wide change, for nearly 9 out of 10 baby foods tested there is no federal safety limit for arsenic, lead and other heavy metals.

“Current arsenic contamination levels in rice cereal and juice are 36% and 75% less, respectively, than the amounts measured a decade ago,” explains HBBF research director and study author Jane Houlihan. “When FDA acts, companies respond. We need the FDA to use their authority more effectively, and much more quickly, to reduce toxic heavy metals in baby foods.” HBBF and its partners have created a [petition to the FDA](#) urging them to take action by setting health-based limits that include the protection of babies’ brain development.

Without prompt FDA regulation to limit contamination levels, accelerated action from baby food companies is necessary to reduce toxic heavy metals to safer levels in foods. The newly announced [Baby Food Council](#) comprised of leading baby food companies and supported by non-profit organizations including the Environmental Defense Fund (EDF) and HBBF seeks to “reduce heavy metals in the companies’ products to as low as reasonably achievable using best-in-class management practices.”

“Parents can protect their babies today by choosing nutritious and affordable alternatives to the most contaminated foods,” says Dr. Landrigan. “And, to protect the babies of tomorrow the food companies and the FDA need to step up and do more.”

HBBF’s partners for this project include [Alaska Community Action on Toxics](#), [Campaign for Healthier Solutions](#), [Coming Clean](#), [Ecology Center](#), [Environmental Justice Health Alliance](#), [Learning Disabilities Association of America](#), [Organizacion en California de Lideres Campesinas, Inc.](#), [Texas Environmental Justice Advocacy Services](#).

To learn more, visit <http://www.healthybabyfood.org/>



## **HEALTHY BABIES BRIGHT FUTURES**

[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 one 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](http://www.hbbf.org)

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