



Closer to Zero: FDA's action plan to lower toxic elements in baby foods

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Reducing infants' and young children's exposure to arsenic, cadmium, lead and mercury from foods they eat is one of the Food and Drug Administration's (FDA's) highest priorities. The FDA has developed a plan, [Closer to Zero](#), which is a science-based, iterative approach to reduce exposure to toxic elements from baby foods to the lowest possible levels.



Pediatricians play an essential role in supporting families as they build healthy eating routines. Parents may ask if a food is dangerous because they heard about contaminants in baby food. Parents should be assured that the FDA regularly tests foods eaten by infants and young children for arsenic, lead, cadmium and mercury. If safety assessments show the food may be injurious to health, the FDA works with manufacturers to remove the product from the market.

Because fruits, vegetables and grains can absorb toxic elements from the water, soil and air, there are limits to how much these levels can be reduced. The FDA collaborates with federal partners, such as the Department of Agriculture and the Environmental Protection Agency, to help growers and manufacturers identify mitigation strategies to lower levels of toxic elements in foods consumed by infants and young children, an approach that has worked well. When FDA testing identified elevated levels of inorganic arsenic in infant rice cereal, the agency

worked with growers and manufacturers and issued guidance to encourage them to make reductions. The result was a nearly 30% reduction in inorganic arsenic in infant rice cereal over approximately six years. Importantly, these measures did not result in unintended consequences, such as reducing access to nutritious foods or increasing one toxic element while trying to reduce another.

The FDA continues to use the best available science to establish toxic element levels in food at which regulatory action may be needed. The FDA has issued draft guidance to manufacturers on inorganic arsenic in apple juice and soon will propose action levels for lead in juices and other foods consumed by young children.

Working with stakeholders like the AAP, the FDA will continue to advance the goals of the Closer to Zero plan. In addition, the FDA and other agencies have educational resources that emphasize the importance of offering children a healthy mix of foods to provide key nutrients for growth and development.

The FDA's Office of Pediatric Therapeutics (OPT), Division of Pediatric and Maternal Health (DPMH) and the Office of Nutrition and Food Labeling (ONFL) contributed to this article. The OPT resides in the Office of Clinical Policy and Programs in the Office of the Commissioner. The DPMH resides in the Office of Rare Diseases, Pediatrics, Urologic and Reproductive Medicine within the Office of New Drugs in the Center for Drug Evaluation and Research. The ONFL resides within the Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition.

Resources

- [Closer to Zero: Action Plan for Baby Foods](#)
- [Resources on healthy eating](#)
- FDA infographics on eating fish during pregnancy and lactation in English, <https://bit.ly/34ovOth>, and Spanish, <https://bit.ly/34ovKtx>
- FDA infographics on feeding fish to children in English, <https://bit.ly/3ogQEBS>, and Spanish, <https://bit.ly/3oh4PXU>
- [Social media toolkit on eating fish, which includes messages for health care providers](#)
- [FDA Total Diet Study](#)