



October 22, 2026

Dear Tribal Leader:

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) is writing to share that today we announced a number of steps to improve the safety of baby food through the Closer to Zero initiative, and to invite you to comment on these actions.

Baby foods can provide essential nutrients that support growth and development of babies and toddlers. Foods such as pureed and packaged fruits and vegetables, along with whole grains, dairy, and proteins, deliver vitamins and other nutrients that are essential for brain development, immune function and bone strength. Because foods get their nutrients from the environments where they are grown and raised, they can also absorb trace amounts of heavy metals present in those environments, such as arsenic, cadmium, lead and mercury.

That is why the FDA is working to ensure that foods intended for babies and young children are as safe as they can be. A key part of that work is the FDA's Closer to Zero initiative, which is focused on reducing dietary exposure to heavy metals like arsenic, cadmium, lead, and mercury to as low as possible, while maintaining access to nutritious foods that support healthy development. Today, the agency is taking steps to advance this important initiative through new draft action levels, preventive controls draft guidance, and other updates.

Cadmium Action Levels

The FDA is proposing new action levels that are intended to guide manufacturers of processed food intended for babies and young children in taking steps to lower the levels of cadmium in their products. The cadmium action levels included in the draft guidance are outlined below:

Processed Food Category	Action Level (parts per billion, ppb)
Processed fruits, vegetables (excluding single-ingredient carrots), and mixtures (including grain and meat-based mixtures)	10 ppb
Single-ingredient carrots	25 ppb
Dry infant cereals	45 ppb
Yogurts, puddings, and custards	20 ppb
Single-ingredient meats	25 ppb

Cadmium is widely present in nature both as an element in the earth's crust and through pollution. Therefore, it can show up in low levels in food. Most of us are exposed to cadmium in the environment safely, but too much can be harmful to human health. Babies and young children can be more susceptible to the effects of heavy metals, like cadmium, because of their different metabolisms and small body sizes.

While it may not be possible to completely eliminate heavy metals, like cadmium, from food, manufacturers can take steps to reduce levels that show up in the foods we eat. Action levels have been shown to be an effective tool for encouraging manufacturers to lower levels of heavy metals in their products. Previous FDA efforts include setting action levels for inorganic arsenic in infant rice cereal and lead in processed food intended for babies and young children; and issuing draft action levels for lead in juices under Closer to Zero. Building on this success, the FDA considers the proposed action levels to be achievable when food manufacturers use control measures to reduce the presence of cadmium.

Comments on the draft guidance should be submitted to www.regulations.gov docket number FDA-2016-D-2343 by January 21, 2027, to be considered during development of the final guidance.

Draft Guidance on Control of Chemical Hazards

To further support industry in lowering levels of heavy metals and other chemical contaminants in their food products, the FDA also released draft guidance on the control of chemical hazards as required under 21 CFR Part 117, [FDA's Preventive Controls for Human Food regulation](#) established under the FDA Food Safety Modernization Act.

The chapter is meant to help manufacturers understand and evaluate potential chemical hazards and identify and implement appropriate current good manufacturing practices (CGMPs) or preventive controls (including supply-chain controls for ingredients) to significantly minimize or prevent these hazards. The draft guidance includes practical examples covering a range of scenarios involving various chemical hazards in human foods, and, when finalized, may be useful, for example, to companies looking to reduce levels of heavy metals in their foods, taking

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into consideration action levels set under the Closer to Zero initiative.

Comments on the draft guidance should be submitted to www.regulations.gov docket number FDA-2016-D-2343 by January 21, 2027 to be considered during development of the final guidance.

Additional Closer to Zero Updates

Along with these actions, the FDA also refreshed its Closer to Zero webpage to provide updates on other Closer to Zero activities. To provide more information on these web updates, the action levels, the new draft guidance and other related food chemical safety initiatives, the FDA will hold a webinar on November 16, 2026. The webinar will be free, but registration is required. You can learn more and register on the [Closer to Zero webinar webpage](#).

Please do not hesitate to reach out if you have any questions. To view an electronic copy of this letter, we invite you to follow the link to our Tribal Affairs/Dear Tribal Leader Letter webpage. For Tribes in need of assistance with any FDA-related issue, please contact the FDA Intergovernmental Affairs (IGA) team at IGA@fda.hhs.gov.

Sincerely,

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Acting Deputy Commissioner for Food
U.S. Food and Drug Administration