

*Baby food
recall*

Release

FSIS-98-RC-16

Media Communications Office
(202) 720-3897; FAX: (202) 720-5704
Contact: Linda Swacina
Pager # 800-759-8888
PIN 8953573
Chris Church

HEINZ RECALLS VEGETABLE CHICKEN DINNER BABY FOOD

Washington, October 9, 1998--The H. J. Heinz Co., a Pittsburgh-based food processing firm, is voluntarily recalling one day's production of its vegetable chicken baby food because the product may contain elevated concentrations of lead, the U. S. Department of Agriculture announced today.

All 4-oz. jars of [Heinz Building Block 2 Vegetable Chicken Dinner] (baby food) with a code beginning with [P3117WB] are being recalled. "P-51" appears inside the USDA inspection seal on the product label. The product was distributed to retail food stores nationwide.

"Because of the potential public health risk associated with exposure to elevated concentrations of lead, especially in young children, we urge consumers who have purchased the suspect product to return it to the place of purchase," said Thomas J. Billy, administrator of USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service. USDA is informing the public so consumers who may have purchased this product can check their cupboards. Parents whose children have consumed this product regularly for several weeks and are concerned should contact their pediatricians.

The problem was discovered by the Food and Drug Administration in the course of conducting its Market Basket Survey. Jars tested in the day's production contained 20-22 micrograms of lead per 4-ounce jar. According to FDA, children from 6-11 months receive, on a daily basis, an average of 4.1 micrograms of lead from food, and children from 12 months to 2 years receive on a daily basis an average of 5.3 micrograms of lead from food. Children and adults are exposed to low levels of lead from food and other sources every day.

Immediately after being notified by FDA of the results, FSIS--which regulates meat and poultry products--worked with the company to initiate the product recall.

Consumers with questions about the recall may phone the toll-free USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline at 1-800-535-4555. The hotline can be reached from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. (Eastern Time), Monday through Friday. Consumers may also wish to call the Heinz Consumer Hotline at 1-800-782-8408.

#

NOTE: Access news releases and other information at the FSIS Web site on the Internet's World Wide Web at <http://www.fsis.usda.gov>

Q and A Sheet for Lead in Heinz Baby Food, October 9, 1998

Q What is lead?

A Lead is an element and occurs both by itself as a metal in the earth's crust and in combination with other elements.

Q How can lead hurt my child?

A Everyone in industrial societies has a small body burden of lead. When too much lead builds up in a child's body, it may be associated with lower IQ, behavior disorders, anemia, slowed growth, and impaired hearing.

Q What is the acceptable intake of lead?

A According to the Food and Drug Administration, the Provisional Tolerable Daily Intake Level for lead is 6 $\mu\text{g}/\text{day}$ for children under 6 years of age. This level assures a 10-fold margin of safety. This means a child would have to ingest 60 μg per day to absorb enough lead to be of concern.

Q What was the level of lead found in the Heinz 2 Vegetable Chicken baby food?

A The level found was about 200 $\mu\text{g}/\text{kilogram}$. Heinz sampled two additional jars from the same lot, and found similar results. This equals 20-22 μg of lead per jar.

Q Would this level exceed FDA's recommendation?

A. Heinz 2 Vegetable Chicken Dinner is sold in 4-oz jars. Yes, a jar of baby food would exceed FDA's recommendation by almost four-fold, if the baby ate one jar per day.

Q If a child has been eating Heinz baby food with this amount of lead in it for the last year, will this increase the amount of lead in the child's body?

A Yes, it will. Keep in mind that a child would have to ingest 60 μg of lead per day to develop a blood lead level of concern, three times the amount in one jar of baby food.

Q What is the typical daily exposure of children to lead?

According to FDA, children from 6 - 11 months receive, on a daily basis, an average of 4.1 μg of lead from food, and 22 μg from other sources; children from 12 mos. to 2 years receive an average of 5.3 μg of lead from food, and 22 μg from other sources. So one jar of baby food contains 4-5 times the amount of lead a child would typically eat in one day.

Q How long has the problem existed at Heinz?

- A We do not yet know how long the problem has existed at the Heinz company. Heinz routinely stores samples from each lot, so that this type of problem can be traced back to its beginning. Heinz is analyzing these samples and other Heinz products now. We hope to have the answers soon.
- Q How will I know if my child has a problem?
- A Most children exposed to lead do not show any symptoms. If the child has consumed this product regularly for several weeks and you are concerned, take the child to a pediatrician for a blood lead test. The level of concern for children 0-6 years of age is 10 μg lead/deciliter.
- Q How did lead get into the baby food?
- A We do not know how the lead got into the baby food, but we are attempting to find out.
- Q What is the government doing to help?
- A The government is requesting that the H.J. Heinz Company recall the baby food that we know is affected and is informing consumers through a press release.
- Q What is the primary lead exposure source for children?
- A The primary source is deteriorating (peeling, cracked) leaded paint that creates leaded dust. Intact leaded paint is generally not hazardous.
- Q Is the method used for lead sensitive enough to detect it at levels of concern?
- A Yes, the method used by FDA has a sensitivity of better than 5- 10 ppb, which is sufficiently sensitive to detect levels that may have health consequences for children.
- Q How was the problem discovered?
- A The problem was discovered during an FDA Market Basket Survey. This is a quarterly survey in which a range of foods representing a typical American diet are analyzed for various substances, including lead. This particular sample was taken in March 1998, and analyzed on September 25, 1998.