



NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF
HEALTH AND MENTAL HYGIENE
Michelle Morse, MD, MPH
Acting Commissioner

2024 Health Advisory #29: Elevated Levels of Lead, Mercury, Arsenic and Cadmium in Traditional Health Remedies

“Please distribute to all clinical staff in complementary and alternative medicine, emergency medicine, family medicine, pediatrics, gastroenterology, gynecology and obstetrics, internal medicine, occupational and environmental health and primary care.”

November 12, 2024

Dear Colleagues,

Certain traditional health remedies, including Traditional Chinese Medicines (TCM) and Ayurvedic medications, can contain high amounts of heavy metals, such as lead, mercury, arsenic, or cadmium and have been associated with toxicity after ingestion. These products may be manufactured or hand-made and can be purchased in New York City or abroad. Routine use of products with high amounts of heavy metals places individuals at an increased risk for adverse health effects. The NYC Health Department recently found [8 TCM](#) products purchased over-the-counter in NYC to contain up to 73,000 parts per million (ppm) lead and 1.1 ppm cadmium. These amounts exceed the permissible limits of 2 ppm for lead and 0.3 ppm for cadmium.

Assess Potential Exposures

- Ask people about use of prescription and non-prescription medicines and supplements, including Traditional Chinese Medicines, Ayurvedic medications and other traditional health remedies.
- Advise individuals to stop or avoid using products known to contain heavy metals that are listed in [Hazardous Supplements and Remedies](#)
- Consider heavy metal testing in people using these types of products in consultation with an expert in heavy metal poisoning or the NYC Poison Center. Testing includes measuring blood lead levels and urine for mercury, arsenic and cadmium content.
- Report known or suspected poisonings to the NYC Poison Center 24/7 at (212) POISONS (764-7667); interpretation is available for people who speak languages other than English.
- Review NYC Health Department Medical Management Guidelines for [Lead](#) and [Mercury](#).

Thank you for helping us keep New Yorkers healthy.

Sincerely,
Mark K Su, MD, MPH
Director
New York City Poison Center

Paromita Hore, PhD, MPH
Director
Environmental Exposure,
Assessment and Education