

By Teresa Frankovich, M.D.

Contact with lead is bad for your health at any age, but especially for children. Recent news reports showed there were high lead levels found in some fruit pouches that young children eat. It is important for parents to know the danger of lead exposure in young children.

Lead poisoning can be stopped

Exposure to lead can cause many health problems, including brain damage. This cannot be reversed, especially in young, growing brains. There is no “safe” level of lead exposure.

Most children have no symptoms. The best way to stop lead poisoning is to know how children get exposed. It is also important to get them tested for lead exposure. Providers must test children at 1 and 2 years old. This can be done with a quick finger poke at a well-child visit. Every child should get a blood lead test before age 6.

How we come into contact with lead

Many of us have likely heard about older homes (pre-1978) having lead-based paint. As this paint ages and peels, dust and paint chips with lead in them can find their way into the hands and mouths of small children. Recently, lead has been found in more places you would not expect. Sometimes, lead can be in the items we eat, drink and use every day.

The products we use come from all over the world, and countries have different customs and rules. This makes it is more likely for someone to come into contact with lead. Examples include cookware, beauty products, herbal medicines, and more. One example is the cinnamon in the fruit pouches mentioned above. They were made in Ecuador, and the cinnamon added to the fruit may have contained lead. They were sold under many [brand names](#) in the United States such as WanaBana, Schnucks, and Weis.

Here are some things to avoid to keep your child safe:

- Dust and paint chips from lead-based paints usually found in older homes built before 1978.
- Soil around older homes and construction sites.
- Water that flows through older pipes that have lead.

The bad news is that lead exposure in children is a big health concern. The good news is that exposure to lead can be stopped. Testing for lead early in a child’s life can help prevent higher levels of exposure.

Here are some tips to stop lead exposure:

- Be careful about the spices, medicines, beauty products, cookware, and tableware that you use.
- Think about the [age of your home and if it may have lead paint](#).
- Talk to your child’s doctor about lead exposure.
- Visit the [California Department of Public Health Lead Prevention Homepage](#) for more tips.

Dr. Teresa Frankovich is an associate medical director for Partnership HealthPlan of California.

