



MEDIA CONTACT

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FDA's New Arsenic Guidelines Fail To Protect Babies From Neurological Impact

The 100 ppb limit suggested, released today, did not consider IQ loss or other forms of neurological impact, allowed cancer risks far outside of protective limits, and failed to account for children who have unusually high exposures to arsenic in rice.

[WASHINGTON, DC] — Today, the FDA [released guidance](#) to manufacturers on the suggested levels of arsenic in rice cereals for infants. Arsenic is strictly regulated in drinking water, but until today, has been unrestricted in infant rice cereal, without a maximum recommended limit. Setting a protective, health-based limit for arsenic in infant rice cereal presents an opportunity to make a significant difference in children's health and safety.

However, at Healthy Babies Bright Futures, our research has shown that **FDA's 100 ppb "action level" is not a protective, health-based limit for babies.** In setting this limit, the agency did not consider IQ loss or other forms of neurological impact, allowed cancer risks far outside of protective limits, and failed to account for children who have unusually high exposures to arsenic in rice.

And FDA failed to consider harm from the multiple toxic heavy metals - arsenic as well as lead, cadmium, and mercury - that contaminate not only rice but other common baby foods as well, all of which contribute to risks for a baby's healthy development. [A 2017 HBBF study found toxic heavy metals in 95 percent of 168 baby foods tested.](#)

Arsenic is a potent human carcinogen and a neurotoxin shown to permanently reduce children's IQ. At least 13 studies link arsenic to IQ loss and other neurodevelopmental impacts for children exposed in utero or during the first few years of life. HBBF's 2017 study found six times more arsenic in infant rice cereal than in other types of infant cereal. Our study also showed that rice cereal, babies' top source of arsenic exposure, contained 85 ppb of arsenic, on average.

"The FDA's announcement is a step towards ensuring that babies' brains are protected from exposure to harmful chemicals, but it is not a large enough step," said Charlotte Brody, National Director of Healthy Babies Bright Futures. "When we released our baby food study in 2017, we suggested that the FDA set an enforceable, health based limit for arsenic in infant rice cereal



and other rice based foods to protect infants from both cancer and neurological harm. Three years later, this newly announced guidance is not the solution. It's just the first step in the right direction.”

This action by the FDA will do little to lower babies' risks from toxic heavy metals in rice-based foods. Due to their high levels of heavy metal contamination, 15 foods consumed by children under two years of age account for 55 percent of the risk to babies' brains. Topping the list are rice-based foods — infant rice cereal, rice dishes and rice-based snacks. These popular baby foods are not only high in inorganic arsenic, the most toxic form of arsenic, but also are nearly always contaminated with three additional toxic heavy metals, lead, cadmium, and mercury.

Lead and arsenic in rice-based foods account for one-fifth of the more than 11 million IQ points children lose from birth to 24 months of age from dietary sources. This concentrated risk underscores the need for more clear and protective action from the FDA and baby food companies.

The lack of guidance on this issue has also played a role in inequality and racial health disparities.

- Children with celiac disease often eat rice in place of gluten-containing grains. They ingest 14 times more arsenic than other children, on average.
- National diet surveys show that Hispanic infants and toddlers are 2.5 times more likely to eat rice on a given day than other children.
- Asian Americans eat nearly 10 times more rice than the national average.
- Black toddlers are 2 to 3 times as likely to eat arsenic-laden rice snacks.

“Making the food that babies eat safe should be the baseline,” Brody said. “Setting a standard for the maximum amount of arsenic allowed in baby foods is a start to keeping them safe — but 100 ppb is still far too high. No amount of arsenic, lead or other toxic heavy metal is safe for babies.”

ABOUT HEALTHY BABIES BRIGHT FUTURES

Healthy Babies Bright Futures (HBBF) is an alliance of scientists, nonprofit organizations and donors working to create and support initiatives that measurably reduce exposures to neurotoxic chemicals in the first one thousand days of development. Our efforts are inspired and supported by science and data, and designed to help restore the chance for a full life to children who would otherwise face brain-diminishing exposures to toxic chemicals. www.hbbf.org

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