



Heavy metals in baby food

April 22, 2026

What are heavy metals doing in baby food?

- These contaminants may occur in the environment naturally (in rocks, soil, water, air) and from human activities.
- The amount of arsenic, lead, cadmium, or mercury in certain foods depends on the amount in the environment. The heavy metals may also enter foods during processing.
- 2021 report from US House Committee on Oversight and Reform raised attention.

Heavy metals can impact a child's health

- Lead, mercury, cadmium and arsenic are metals or metalloids that can alter a child's development. Some of these changes can be permanent.
- These metals can cause health problems starting in infancy that continue into adulthood.
- Long-term exposure may increase the risk of cancer and cause damage to the kidneys, heart and central nervous system.
- Children are more vulnerable because of their smaller size, higher relative consumption of food, and rapid neurological development.

Health effects of arsenic

- Health risks known to be associated with arsenic exposure impact multiple organ systems, the most severe effects being damage to the central nervous system and cognitive development in children.
- Arsenic in a child's body can:
 - Alter their neurodevelopment, leading to impaired memory, learning problems and behavioral problems
 - Lead to an increased risk of cancer including skin, bladder, and lung cancer
 - Cause heart defects
- Some people in Vermont are already exposed to too much arsenic through drinking water.

Health effects of lead

- There is no safe level of lead in the body.
- Lead in a child's body can:
 - Hurt their brain, kidneys and nervous system
 - Slow down growth and development
 - Make it hard to learn
 - Damage hearing and speech
 - Cause behavior problems
- Children with lead-associated developmental delays showed persistent cognitive deficits into adulthood.
- Many Vermont children are already at risk of lead exposure from paint or other lead sources in the home.

Health effects of mercury

- Mercury is particularly dangerous to children.
- Even low concentrations can have harmful long-term health effects.
- Mercury is a neurotoxin causing damage to the central nervous system, kidneys and liver, cognitive impairment, and developmental issues. Mercury in a child's body can affect their:
 - Hearing
 - Learning
 - Movement, coordination and balance
 - Heart function

Health effects of cadmium

- Cadmium is a human carcinogen.
- Cadmium in child's body can:
 - Alter brain development in infancy
 - Negatively affect IQ scores
 - Linked to increased incidence of ADHD
 - Damage kidneys

Reducing heavy metals in baby food can lead to better outcomes for Vermont children.

- Reduced exposure to heavy metals **reduces a child's risk of:**
 - Memory problems
 - Behavioral problems
 - Lower IQ
 - Heart dysfunction
 - Cancer

Thank you!

Let's stay in touch.

Email: Julie.Arel@vermont.gov and Andrea.Kirk@vermont.gov

Web: HealthVermont.gov

Social: @HealthVermont

