

# FDA wants to lower lead levels in baby food

January 24 2023, by Cara Murez

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The U.S. Food and Drug Administration has proposed stricter limits on levels of lead in infant food products.

The agency announced draft guidance for manufacturers that would lower allowable lead levels in processed foods meant for infants and children 2 years and younger.

The change could reduce dietary exposure to lead, which can cause neurological and developmental harm, the FDA said.

"For more than 30 years, the FDA has been working to reduce exposure to lead, and other [environmental contaminants](#), from foods. This work has resulted in a dramatic decline in [lead exposure](#) from foods since the mid-1980s," FDA Commissioner Dr. Robert Califf said in an agency news release.

"The proposed action levels announced today, along with our continued work with our state and federal partners, and with industry and growers to identify mitigation strategies, will result in long-term, meaningful and sustainable reductions in the exposure to this contaminant from foods," he added.

The proposed limits could reduce lead exposure for babies who eat these foods by as much as 24% to 27%, Califf said.

The move is part an ongoing push by the FDA to reduce exposure to lead, arsenic, cadmium and mercury to the lowest levels possible in foods eaten by babies and [young children](#)—a program it calls Closer to Zero.

Tuesday's proposal would apply to baby foods sold in jars, pouches, tubs and boxes.

Limits would be 10 parts per billion (ppb) for fruits and vegetables, with the exception of single-ingredient root vegetables. This limit would also apply to grain- and meat-based mixtures, yogurts, custards/puddings and

single-ingredient meats.

For single-ingredient root vegetables and dry cereals, the proposed limit would be 20 ppb.

The action levels differ because consumption levels of foods differ and because some foods naturally absorb more lead from the environment they're grown in.

The presence of a contaminant doesn't mean the [food](#) is unsafe to eat, the FDA emphasized.

It evaluates the level of the contaminant in the food and exposure to determine if there is a potential health risk. It is not possible to remove lead and the other contaminants entirely from the food supply, the agency said.

"We expect that the recommended action levels will cause manufacturers to implement agricultural and processing measures to lower lead levels in their food products below the proposed action levels, thus reducing the potential harmful effects associated with dietary lead exposures," the FDA said in the release.

While the action levels will not be binding, they're one factor the FDA will consider in enforcement.

"The action levels in today's draft guidance are not intended to direct consumers in making food choices," said Susan Mayne, director of the FDA's Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition.

"To support child growth and development, we recommend parents and caregivers feed children a varied and nutrient-dense diet across and within the main food groups of vegetables, fruits, grains, dairy and

protein foods," she said in the release.

Mayne said this approach helps children get important nutrients and may reduce harmful effects from exposure to contaminants.

The FDA noted that it is committed to assessing whether action levels should be lowered even more, based on evolving science on health impacts and how achievable lower limits would be.

The FDA is considering more than 1,100 comments received in November 2021 at a public meeting on lowering contaminant levels.

The agency plans to host a webinar to provide an overview of the draft guidance and answer questions, and will announce more details soon.

**More information:** The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has more on [lead in food and other products](#).

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