

# Lead-tainted applesauce may contain another toxin, chromium

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Applesauce fruit puree pouches under recall and investigation for toxic lead levels may also contain another toxin, chromium, according to an [update](#) released Friday by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA).

The products under recall are WanaBana, Weis and Schnucks brand

[cinnamon](#)-flavored applesauce pouches. All were made by AustroFoods at a facility in Ecuador that is currently under FDA inspection. High lead levels appear tied to cinnamon used in the applesauce that was supplied by another company, Negasmart, the FDA said.

At least 287 confirmed, probable and suspect cases of lead poisoning linked to tainted fruit puree pouches have now been reported in 37 states, according to the [latest update](#) from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

Now chromium has emerged as another possible toxin.

"After additional analysis of both recalled cinnamon apple products and the cinnamon collected from the manufacturer in Ecuador, FDA has determined that, in addition to lead, the cinnamon and recalled products also contained a high level of chromium," the FDA announced in its Friday update.

Chromium is a naturally occurring element that comes in various forms. According to the CDC, chromium III is an essential nutrient, while chromium VI is known to cause cancer.

At this time, however, FDA "was not able to definitively determine the form of chromium in the cinnamon apple puree sample," the agency said.

In any case, "people who ate recalled products, especially if they had elevated [blood lead levels](#), may have been exposed to chromium and should inform their healthcare provider so they can monitor health and provide supportive care, as needed," the FDA said.

## **Ongoing investigation**

Meanwhile, investigation into U.S. lead poisoning cases tied to the applesauce pouches continues.

The median age for cases in the investigation "is nearly 2 years old," a CDC spokesperson told *CBS News*, though reports have come in for children as old as 9.

Federal officials have urged state health departments to seek out cases of lead poisoning, which could be missed if children who ate lead-tainted applesauce don't get blood tests from their doctor for the toxic metal.

AustroFoods said last month that it will reimburse customers up to \$150 for lead tests.

In early December, FDA said the tainted fruit puree pouches were found to contain levels of toxic lead that were 2,000 times higher than proposed standards.

Tests conducted at an Ecuadorean facility run by Austrofoods found that cinnamon supplied to the plant by another company, Negasmart, contained "extremely high levels of lead contamination, 5110 parts per million (ppm) and 2270 ppm," the FDA said in its [update](#).

To put that into context, an international body charged with setting lead limits in bark-sourced spices such as cinnamon "is considering adopting a maximum level of 2.5 ppm for lead in bark spices," the FDA said.

## **'Intentional act'**

Speaking to *Politico* in early December, an FDA source said the cinnamon used in the recalled applesauce may have been deliberately tainted.

"We're still in the midst of our investigation," [Jim Jones](#), the FDA's deputy commissioner for human foods, told *Politico*. "But so far all of the signals we're getting lead to an intentional act on the part of someone in the [supply chain](#) and we're trying to sort of figure that out."

"My instinct is they didn't think this product was going to end up in a country with a robust regulatory process," Jones said. "They thought it was going to end up in places that did not have the ability to detect something like this."

According to *Politico*, the FDA suspects the deliberate adulteration of cinnamon included in the applesauce products was "economically motivated."

The FDA said Negasmart, the source of the tainted cinnamon, is now operating under an "Ecuadorian administrative sanctions process."

Jones told *Politico* that food adulteration outside the United States "is always going to be tricky to absolutely stop, if somebody has intent to purposefully do something like this."

An FDA spokesperson also told *Politico*: "We have limited authority over foreign ingredient suppliers that do not directly ship product to the U.S. because their food undergoes further manufacturing/processing prior to export."

Still, he said, "we're going to chase that data and find whoever was responsible and hold them accountable."

## **Advice to parents**

So far, sample analysis of WanaBana, Weis and Schnucks fruit puree pouches that do not contain cinnamon and are not part of the recall have

not shown elevated levels of lead.

In its [initial alert](#) on the recall issued in late October, the FDA said four children in North Carolina were the first to be found to have high levels of lead in their blood that was linked to the WanaBana products.

By law, food manufacturers have a responsibility to prevent chemical hazards when needed, the FDA noted. This includes measures to lower or eliminate the presence of lead in their products.

The FDA has warned families not to eat or serve these products and encourages them to throw out the pouches or return them to the store where they were purchased for a refund.

Caregivers should take any children who may have eaten these products to have blood tests to check for lead exposure, the CDC added.

Lead is toxic to humans, particularly children, and there is no safe level of exposure, the [CDC](#) says. Exposure can cause developmental delays in children. Initial symptoms of lead poisoning may include head, stomach and muscle aches, vomiting, anemia, irritability, fatigue and weight loss.

**More information:** Visit the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention for more on the [dangers of lead exposure](#).

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