

SOLVING A TOXIC MYSTERY

How Global Stakeholders Worked Together to Solve Spice Contamination in Georgia

1 Alarm Bells in NYC

Investigations by the NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH) revealed that spices from Georgia were a source of lead exposure in NYC's Georgian population.¹ NYC DOHMH notified Georgian authorities.



3 Pure Earth Conducts Lead Exposure Assessment

Pure Earth conducted site visits to Georgian homes and assessed lead content in soil, dust, paint, water, spices, toys, and cookware, confirming exceptionally high lead levels in spices.³ Pure Earth's investigators found that most of the lead was getting into spices during processing by large spice importers and wholesale retailers.⁴



5 Reductions in NYC

In New York City, based on preliminary data from 2017 to 2022, a decline is seen in the percentage of spice samples from Georgia with detectable lead. Also, the rate of children with elevated BLLs declined over 90% among NYC children with Georgian ancestry.



2 Georgia Takes Action

Georgian authorities conducted spice sampling and blood lead level (BLL) surveillance.² The BLL study was integrated in the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS), implemented by the National Statistics office with technical and financial support from UNICEF, the National Center for Disease Control and Public Health (NCDC) and Italian Institute of Health.

4 Georgia launches Enforcement and Education Campaign

Aggressive enforcement by the government has been essential and effective. Pure Earth found that in the Adjara region, the main hotspot for adulterated spices, the average concentration of lead in spice samples decreased by 90% in 2 years.



The global food production system is complex and interdependent. But with global cooperation, we can stop pollution at the source.

1. [A Spoonful of Lead: A 10-Year Look at Spices as a Potential Source of Lead Exposure](#). Journal of Public Health Management and Practice
2. [Lead Problem in Georgia](#). Georgian National Center for Disease Control and Public Health.
3. [Elevated Levels of Lead \(Pb\) Identified in Georgian Spices](#). Annals of Global Health.
4. [Solving the Mystery of Widespread Lead Poisoning in Georgian Children](#). Pure Earth.