

Household products tied to 20% of child lead poisonings

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A new analysis shows lead-contaminated spices, cookware, toys and other consumer products were a source of exposure in 1 out of 5 surveyed homes, re-upping calls to broaden regulatory scrutiny beyond lead in paint, pipes and dust.

The New York-based nonprofit Pure Earth [published an analysis](#) Wednesday in the peer-reviewed *Environmental Health Perspectives* journal that examined data from 4,831 investigations between 2010 and 2021 in homes with known lead poisonings.

Consumer products were identified as a source of lead exposure in 969, or 20 percent, of homes across the four U.S. jurisdictions studied — California, New York City, Oregon and King County, Washington.

Exposures varied depending on areas. In 2019, consumer products were a potential source of lead exposure in 15 percent of 1,462 New York City homes, whereas 38 percent of 42 homes in King County, Washington, were at potential risk from consumer products the same year, according to the analysis.

It's the first time researchers have compiled data from multiple jurisdictions to evaluate the extent to which consumer products contribute to higher blood lead levels in children, according to Pure Earth.

Housing-related exposures from lead drinking water pipes, lead-based paints and dust containing lead have traditionally been viewed as the main sources of exposure to the heavy metal, which has been tied to permanent brain damage, developmental harms and other neurotoxic effects especially risky for young children.

The analysis showed those "traditional" sources are still a leading cause of exposure; approximately 37 percent of homes surveyed had lead-contaminated paint, dust, soil or water.

Household sources are where agencies like EPA, which is working to finalize more stringent lead standards [in water](#) as well as in [paint and dust](#), have targeted their efforts.

Richard Fuller, president of Pure Earth, said the analysis "is a wake-up call."

"We need to expand our focus beyond lead in paint and pipe to better protect children from harm," Fuller said in a statement. "Our findings show that imported consumer products are also an under appreciated source of lead exposures. It's time to take decisive action."

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2.5 percent of children between the ages of 1 to 5 have levels of lead in their blood above the CDC's reference value, but the widespread consensus among health experts is that there is no safe level of lead exposure.

The U.S. banned the use of lead in many consumer products, including paints, dishes and things marketed to children, in 1978, but it's still heavily used in other countries that export products.

It's a problem that disproportionately impacts immigrant families, refugees and historically disadvantaged communities.

Some of the most well-known products include spices and aluminum or brass cookware from South Asia, pottery from Central America or traditional medicines from India or China, according to the analysis.

"The connection between local and global is undeniable," Paromita Hore, director of environmental exposure assessment and education in the New York City Health Department, said in a statement. "What starts as a home investigation in Queens could lead us to a marketplace in Dhaka. It's time for a coordinated effort to tackle this issue at its source."