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PRESS RELEASE

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Attorney General Brown Calls on FDA to Protect Children from Lead and Other Toxic Metals in Baby Food

Over 400 Recent Lead Poisoning Cases Connected to Recalled Cinnamon Applesauce Pouches Highlight Urgent Need for Stronger Protections

BALTIMORE, MD (February 20, 2024) – Maryland Attorney General Anthony G. Brown joined a coalition of 20 Attorneys General calling on the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to take urgent action to protect babies and young children nationwide from lead and other toxic metals in baby food. In a [letter](#), Attorney General Brown and the coalition urged FDA to act on a pending request, originally filed in October 2021, that FDA issue specific guidance to the baby food industry to require testing of all finished food products for lead and other toxic metals. The coalition emphasizes the critical need for FDA action, citing recent findings of hundreds of childhood lead poisonings linked to [recalled cinnamon applesauce pouches](#) that were sold in stores throughout the country without first being tested for toxic metals.

Despite the agency concluding years ago that babies and young children are more vulnerable to the harmful effects of toxic metals, FDA has finalized only one “action level” – a tool designed to lower levels of contaminants in food – for one type of toxic metal (inorganic arsenic) in one type of baby food product (infant rice cereal). Under current FDA policy, baby food manufacturers can decide whether or not to even test their finished products for toxic metals and other contaminants.

“Parents trust companies to provide safe and healthy products for their children. We can't leave it to companies to test for contaminants that harm our kids,” **said Attorney General Brown**. “I urge the FDA to protect children and require baby and toddler food manufacturers to test their products before sending them to market.”

In April 2021, FDA announced the “Closer to Zero” plan, under which the agency committed to proposing action levels for lead in various baby foods by April 2022, inorganic arsenic in various baby foods by April 2024, and cadmium and mercury sometime after April 2024. FDA has since removed those deadlines from its Closer to Zero website. This delay in FDA action is both a public health concern and a matter of environmental justice because children living in low-income communities and communities of color, compared to other children, are impacted at a

higher rate by lead from lead-based paint, lead in drinking water pipes, and other sources. Lead in their food only worsens the existing hazards these children face.

In October 2021, a coalition of Attorneys General including Maryland, urged the agency to issue clear industry guidance on testing for lead and other toxic metals in finished baby and toddler food products. FDA denied the petition in May 2022 and the coalition quickly asked the agency to reconsider in June 2022. The recent letter renews the call for FDA to take urgent action to protect families from lead and other toxic metals in baby food products.

In the letter, the coalition highlights recent widespread childhood lead poisonings related to high levels of lead detected in WanaBana, Schnucks, and Weis brand cinnamon applesauce pouches that were not tested for toxic metals and have since been recalled. The now-recalled WanaBana pouches were sold in Dollar Tree stores throughout the country. The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) has identified over 400 confirmed or probable childhood lead poisoning cases tied to children eating these cinnamon applesauce pouches, including a number in Maryland.



Consumers who have purchased these recalled products and may still have them in their homes should not feed them to children or anyone else. Instead, they should be safely discarded by carefully opening each pouch and emptying the contents into the garbage so that others cannot eat them. For more information on these recalled products, consult [FDA](https://www.fda.gov).

In sending this letter to FDA, Attorney General Brown joins the Attorneys General of Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Hawaii, Illinois, Maine, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Nevada, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Vermont, Washington, and Wisconsin.

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