



NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF  
HEALTH AND MENTAL HYGIENE  
Thomas Farley, M.D., M.P.H.  
*Commissioner*

## 2010 DOHMH Health Alert # 6

### ADULT LEAD POISONING ASSOCIATED WITH USE OF VITA-BREATH, AN HERBAL SUPPLEMENT

- Advise patients to stop using Vita Breath and other products known to contain lead or other heavy metals.
- Ask your patients about their use of traditional, complementary and alternative remedies including supplements, vitamins, tonics, and herbal medicine products.
- Obtain blood lead tests for patients who report using traditional, complementary and alternative products.
- Report all known or suspected poisonings, including blood lead levels  $\geq 10$   $\mu\text{g/dL}$ , to the NYC Poison Control Center, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, at (212) 764-7667.

**Please Distribute to**

**All Clinical Staff in Emergency Medicine, Primary Care, Family Medicine, Internal Medicine, Pediatrics, Gastroenterology, Laboratory Medicine, Neurology, Psychiatry, Occupational and Environmental Health, Allergy, and Complementary or Alternative Medicine.**

**Please also share with your non-hospital based colleagues.**

June 8, 2010

Dear Colleagues,

The NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH) continues to identify herbal remedies that may contain high levels of heavy metals. Products have been identified through interviews of adults with elevated blood lead levels and DOHMH investigations of available products in NYC stores. Some products were either prescribed by traditional, holistic, naturopathic, complementary or alternative medicine practitioners or were self-prescribed. During a recent lead poisoning case investigation, DOHMH identified elevated levels of lead in an herbal supplement called Vita Breath.

#### **Case Report**

In January of 2010, an individual with a blood lead level of 22 $\mu\text{g/dL}$  was reported to the NYC DOHMH Adult Lead Program. She reported self-prescribing herbal supplements purchased at an Expo held in New York City. One of the products, Vita Breath, manufactured by American Herbal Laboratories Inc. in Rosemead, California, was found to contain 1,100ppm lead. She was using the supplement for incontinence and to test the “strength of meridians”. This case finding has resulted in a nation-wide consumer warning by the United States Food and Drug Administration, available at <http://www.fda.gov/NewsEvents/Newsroom/PressAnnouncements/ucm210448.htm>. In addition, the manufacturer recently issued a recall for the supplement.

### **What Providers Should Do**

DOHMH recommends that health care providers ask patients about their use of prescription as well as non-prescription health remedies including supplements, vitamins, tonics, herbal, Ayurvedic, acupuncture, and mineral products. Health remedies may be manufactured or home-made, and may be available for purchase in NYC or obtained outside the U.S.

If patients report using the Vita Breath or other traditional, complementary and alternative remedies, providers should advise them to get a blood lead test. To report heavy metal poisonings or products that may contain heavy metals, providers should call DOHMH at 212-788-4290 during business hours, or the NYC Poison Control Center at 212-764-7667 during non-business hours and weekends.

**For more information about herbal medicine products found to contain high levels of lead or other heavy metals, visit [www.nyc.gov/lead](http://www.nyc.gov/lead).**

As always, we appreciate our ongoing partnership with NYC healthcare providers in reporting and investigating unusual disease manifestations or clusters.

Sincerely,

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