



NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF  
HEALTH AND MENTAL HYGIENE  
Oxiris Barbot, MD  
Commissioner

### 2019 Health Advisory #: 14

#### Elevated Levels of Lead, Mercury and Arsenic in Certain Ayurvedic Medications from India

- A recent New York City adult lead poisoning case, with an elevated blood lead level of 90 mcg/dL, was associated with the use of the following Ayurvedic medications: *Puspadhanwa Ras*, *Shukramatrika Bati* and *Manmath Ras*, all made in India by Shree Baidyanath Ayurved Bhawan Pvt. Ltd.
- These medications had levels of lead, mercury and arsenic as high as 130,000 parts per million (ppm), 170,000 ppm and 14 ppm, respectively.
- Providers should ask patients about their use of prescription and non-prescription medicines, including Ayurvedic and other complementary or alternative medicines.
- For patients who report using such products, providers should consider testing for heavy metals, including blood lead, urine mercury and urine arsenic, in consultation with an expert in heavy metal poisoning or the New York City Poison Control Center.
- Report all known or suspected poisonings by calling the Poison Control Center 24 hours a day/7 days a week at (212) POISONS (764-7667); Spanish-speaking callers, call (212) VENENOS (836-3667).

**Please distribute to all clinical staff in Complementary or Alternative Medicine, Emergency Medicine, Family Medicine, Pediatrics, Gastroenterology, Gynecology & Obstetrics, Internal Medicine, Occupational and Environmental Health and Primary Care.**

June 17, 2019

Dear Colleagues:

In April 2019, the New York City Health Department's Poison Control Center and the Adult Lead Poisoning Prevention Program were notified of an adult male with a blood lead level of 78 mcg/dL, which subsequently increased to 90 mcg/dL. The patient initially presented to a New York City hospital with a chief complaint of abdominal pain. After an inconclusive evaluation for the abdominal pain, including an MRI and a CT scan of the abdomen and pelvis, as well as an upper endoscopy, the patient's only significant finding was an isolated anemia. This prompted a request for a blood lead level test as part of the diagnostic evaluation for anemia of unclear etiology; results showed a significantly elevated blood lead level. A follow-up investigation revealed that the patient was using three Ayurvedic medications, which were prescribed by a physician in India for reproductive health. The medications, *Puspadhanwa Ras*, *Shukramatrika Bati* and *Manmath Ras*, were all made in India by Shree Baidyanath Ayurved Bhawan Pvt. Ltd. The patient reported ingesting two pills of each medication daily for about 60 days before stopping use due to symptoms of abdominal pain and fatigue. Levels of lead, mercury and arsenic in these medications were as high as 130,000 parts per million (ppm), 170,000 ppm and 14 ppm, respectively. These levels exceed the permissible limits for lead (2 ppm), mercury (1 ppm), and arsenic (3 ppm) in certain food additives, as referenced by the Food and Nutrition Board and the Institute of Medicine of the National Academies. The patient received chelation with British Anti-Lewisite followed by succimer as an outpatient. Approximately three weeks after receiving chelation therapy, the patient had a blood lead level of 34 mcg/dL; his blood lead levels are being monitored to ensure that they are decreasing appropriately.

The New York City Health Department reminds health care providers that the use of complementary and alternative medicines is common. Although not all Ayurvedic medications include heavy metals intentionally, the patient reported using “rasa shastra” Ayurvedic medications, which is a type of Ayurvedic medication that is intentionally prepared with metal, mineral or gem compounds. These products may be manufactured or hand-made and can be purchased in New York City or abroad. Users of products found to contain high levels of heavy metals are at an increased risk for adverse health effects.

Health care providers should:

- 1) Ask patients about their use of prescription and non-prescription medicines and supplements, including Ayurvedic and other traditional medicines.
- 2) Advise patients to stop using products known to contain lead and other heavy metals.
- 3) Consider testing patients for heavy metals, including blood lead, urine mercury and urine arsenic, if use is reported.
- 4) Review [NYC DOHMH Recommended Medical Management Guidelines](#), and for additional information, visit [www.nyc.gov/lead](http://www.nyc.gov/lead).

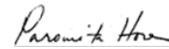
Sincerely,



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