

## Lead in Food – Frequently Asked Questions

EDF's report – [Lead in food: A hidden health threat](#) – evaluated publicly available data from the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and found frequent detections of lead in certain types of baby food. The report builds on a prior analysis by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) indicating that food is a meaningful source of young children's exposure to lead. Read the full report [here](#).

### Why haven't I heard about lead in food before?

Most of the discussion about reducing lead exposure has focused on [paint](#), [drinking water](#), and contaminated soil or dust because those sources are most likely to give children very high blood lead levels. In January 2017, the [EPA released its cumulative estimate of lead](#) in the diet. The last rigorous evaluation was done by FDA in 1993 when it banned lead in solder for metal food cans. We reviewed EPA's analysis, reached out to FDA to discuss the results, and undertook a review of [FDA's data](#).

### Why did EPA do the analysis and not FDA?

[EPA's analysis](#) was prompted by a comprehensive review of lead as a result of the drinking water contamination in Flint, MI. To evaluate the risk posed by lead in drinking water, the agency evaluated the contribution of other sources, including food. We don't know why FDA has not updated its analysis and standards since 1993, especially since a main purpose of the agency's [Total Diet Study](#) is to estimate consumer's exposure to chemical contaminants.

### How does lead get into food?

We don't know for certain. We could not find a rigorous assessment from FDA or others of the sources of lead in food. [FDA appears to attribute](#) the lead in food to contaminated soil. More research on sources of lead in food is needed. In the report, we identify the following potential sources of lead in the food supply chain: absorption from contaminated soil into the crop; contact with contaminated soil in the field; contamination during processing; and incidental contamination of food or food contact materials during processing.

### Are the levels found by EDF likely to result in high blood lead levels in children?

We don't think the lead levels found through FDA's Total Diet Study are sufficient to result in high blood lead levels. Rather, the problem lies in the cumulative exposure of almost all children to low amounts of lead in many foods.

### Should I stop giving my child certain types of food or particular brands?

EDF is not recommending avoiding certain types of food or particular brands. The FDA data EDF used for the report does not include brand information. Even for the types of food where lead was commonly found, there are still samples with no detectable lead. Parents can consult with their pediatricians to learn about all the ways to reduce lead exposure from all sources. Parents should also check with their favorite brands to ask whether the company regularly tests

their products for lead and ensures that – especially for baby food – there is less than 1 parts per billion (ppb) of lead in the food they sell.

### **Should I have my child's blood tested for lead?**

Parents of young children should consult with their pediatrician to learn about all the ways to reduce lead exposure in the home.

### **What is FDA doing about lead in food?**

FDA has been re-evaluating its standards and testing methods for lead in food. EDF urges that the agency move more quickly to update its tolerances taking into consideration the scientific information from the last decade indicating the risks of exposure to low levels of lead. The agency recently created a [Q&A page](#) describing what it has done about lead in food, the current standards, and planned next steps.

### **In the report, EDF mentions a Freedom of Information Act request that may provide brand information. When will that be available?**

EDF submitted a FOIA request on March 16, 2017 to obtain brand-level information from FDA. We are still waiting on FDA to provide the information and have asked the agency to make it publicly available as soon as possible.

### **What is EDF doing to reduce lead exposure from non-food sources?**

EDF is tackling the major sources of lead exposure by working to [make replacement of lead service lines a priority](#) instead of a last resort, [update lead-based paint prevention policies](#), identify and explain the [risks of exposure](#), and expand efforts in [lead poisoning prevention](#).