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HDHHS detects lead, arsenic in seven South Asian traditional remedies

The Houston Department of Health and Human Services (HDHHS) warns residents against consuming seven South Asian traditional remedies after tests confirm they contain lead and arsenic.

Available at Houston area retail stores targeting the local Indian and Pakistani community, the remedies are used as alternative treatments for conditions such as high blood pressure, obesity, bronchitis and mild fever and to improve digestion or maintain good health.

Lead can harm virtually every system in the human body, but it is especially damaging to the developing brain and nervous system of fetuses and young children. It can damage the kidneys and the reproductive system and cause high blood pressure.

Arsenic poisoning can cause disorders of the digestive tract, dehydration, coma and paralysis. Both toxins can result in death when high levels accumulate in the body.

Remedies imported from India that HDHHS confirmed through laboratory tests as sources of lead and arsenic are:

- Balrakshak Sogati, made by Nehar Pharmaceuticals, contains 1.96 parts per million (ppm) of lead and 2.83 ppm of arsenic.
- Triphla, made by ASFA, contains 1.51 ppm of lead and 0.58 ppm of arsenic.
- Zandu-Sudarshan, made by Zandu Pharmacy, contains 1.45 ppm of lead and 0.87 ppm of arsenic.

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- Balguti Kaseria, made by Kasery Pharmacy, contains 12.6 ppm of lead and 39 ppm of arsenic.
- Balsathi, made by Vaaidya J.G. Dwivedi, contains 0.5 ppm of lead and 0.5 ppm of arsenic.
- Soma-34, made by Sheth Brothers, contains 1.06 ppm of lead and 0.5 ppm of arsenic.
- Triphla Guggul, made by Nahar Pharmaceuticals, contains 4.18 ppm of lead and 2.32 ppm of arsenic.

None of the remedies, purchased by HDHHS staff at Southwest Houston area stores, list lead or arsenic as ingredients. HDHHS has not confirmed thus far any cases lead or arsenic poisoning related to use of the remedies.

HDHHS recommends that people who have purchased any of the remedies to immediately discontinue their use and call their primary care physician to request a blood test able to detect the toxins. The recommendation is especially important for pregnant women and young children. They should only take pills or medications specifically recommended by their physician.

Lead poisoning symptoms include headaches, irritability, abdominal pain, vomiting, anemia, weight loss, poor attention span, noticeable learning difficulty, slowed speech development, hyperactivity and muscle aches. Symptoms, however, usually become apparent several years after the lead poisoning began or occurred.

Arsenic symptoms include burning pain throughout the gastrointestinal tract, vomiting and purging, dehydration, convulsions and diarrhea.

HDHHS urges physicians treating people with the symptoms to inquire about the use of the remedies.

HDHHS will begin visiting stores that sell the remedies to ask owners to immediately stop sales of the products and remove them from their inventory. HDHHS will also ask the vendors to post a fact sheet that informs consumers about the products containing the toxins and recommends that they discontinue their use.

For more information, consumers can call HDHHS' Children's Environmental Program at 713-794-9217.

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