



NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF
HEALTH AND MENTAL HYGIENE
Dave A. Chokshi, MD, MSc
Commissioner

2021 Health Advisory #: 37
Elevated Levels of Lead in Traditional Ceramic Ware

- Fifteen recent cases of lead poisoning have been associated with use of traditional or handmade ceramic ware used for preparing or serving food and drink.
- Providers should ask patients, particularly individuals of Latin American, North African and Eastern European descent, whether they use these types of traditional ceramic ware for preparing foods or drinks. If a patient reports use, providers should consider conducting a blood lead test in consultation with a medical toxicologist or the New York City Poison Control Center (1-800-222-1222). Advise patients against using such products for culinary purposes.
- Per New York State law health care providers must test children for blood lead at ages 1- and 2-years and screen older children up to age 6 for lead exposure. Pregnant people should also be assessed at their first prenatal visit.

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

September 28, 2021

Dear Colleagues,

The New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH) recently identified 15 new cases of lead poisoning in children and adults, with elevated blood lead levels as high as 53 micrograms per deciliter ($\mu\text{g}/\text{dL}$), associated with the use of traditional ceramic ware used for cooking and serving foods or drinks. A blood lead level greater than 5 $\mu\text{g}/\text{dL}$ indicates a significant exposure to lead. Although individuals with elevated blood lead levels may not look or feel sick, exposure to lead can cause serious health problems. In children, lead exposure can cause learning and behavior problems; in adults, lead exposure can increase blood pressure and affect the brain, kidneys and reproductive organs. Exposure during pregnancy can increase the risk of miscarriage and affect the unborn baby.

Traditional ceramic ware from various countries around the world, including Mexico, Ecuador, Turkey, Morocco and Uzbekistan, have been found to contain lead at levels thousands of times higher than regulatory [limits](#). The lead used on ceramic ware can transfer to food or drinks that are prepared, stored or served in these products.

Health care providers should ask their patients, particularly individuals of Latin American, North African and Eastern European descent, about their use of traditional ceramic ware for preparing, cooking, storing or serving foods. If their patient reports use of these types of ceramic ware for food or drinks, consider giving them a blood lead test and advise them to immediately stop use. For more information about these types of harmful consumer products, visit www.nyc.gov/lead. More resources for health care providers on lead exposure can be found [here](#).

Sincerely,

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