

9-2007

Lead-Contaminated Candies in Southern Nevada

Shawn Gerstenberger

University of Nevada, Las Vegas, shawn.gerstenberger@unlv.edu

Glenn Savage

Southern Nevada Health District

Clayton Sellers

Southern Nevada Health District


Keith Zupnik

Southern Nevada Health District

Emmanuel C. Gorospe

University of Nevada, Las Vegas

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalscholarship.unlv.edu/env_occ_health_fac_articles

 Part of the [Community-Based Research Commons](#), [Food Science Commons](#), [Medicine and Health Commons](#), [Public Health Commons](#), and the [Toxicology Commons](#)

Repository Citation

Gerstenberger, S., Savage, G., Sellers, C., Zupnik, K., Gorospe, E. C. (2007). Lead-Contaminated Candies in Southern Nevada. *Public Health Reports*, 122(5), 572-572.

https://digitalscholarship.unlv.edu/env_occ_health_fac_articles/28

This Article is protected by copyright and/or related rights. It has been brought to you by Digital Scholarship@UNLV with permission from the rights-holder(s). You are free to use this Article in any way that is permitted by the copyright and related rights legislation that applies to your use. For other uses you need to obtain permission from the rights-holder(s) directly, unless additional rights are indicated by a Creative Commons license in the record and/or on the work itself.

This Article has been accepted for inclusion in Environmental & Occupational Health Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of Digital Scholarship@UNLV. For more information, please contact digitalscholarship@unlv.edu.

Letter to the Editor

LEAD-CONTAMINATED CANDIES IN SOUTHERN NEVADA

Lead-contaminated candies from Latin America are beginning to gain attention in the public media^{1,2} and in the medical literature.³⁻⁵ These candies come from a number of sources and are manufactured outside Food and Drug Administration regulatory control. In 2005, we sampled 50 imported Latin American candies sold in Southern Nevada. A total of 20 (40%) tested positive with an average lead content of 1.46 ± 0.27 mg/kg in the candies' wrappers and straws, based on standard Graphite Furnace Atomic Absorption Spectrophotometry methodology. Given these results, the Southern Nevada Health District issued a cease-and-desist order on February 13, 2006, to local commercial establishments selling imported Latin American candies.

Parallel with our efforts to eliminate lead-contaminated candies, the Southern Nevada Lead Poisoning Prevention Program identified 13 children whose increased blood lead levels (BLLs) were likely associated with the consumption of such candies. These cases were initially diagnosed by local physicians whose referrals resulted in home lead-risk investigations, where we encountered lead-tainted candies.

Childhood lead poisoning is an important health disparities issue that affects children of Hispanic communities in the U.S.^{6,7} In our ongoing Lead Poisoning Prevention program, 23 of our total cases (88%) are Hispanic.⁸ Among the 13 children with elevated BLLs and a history of imported candy consumption, 10 (77%) are also of Hispanic descent. Despite the present ban, many of these lead-tainted candies are still sold in flea markets and brought to Nevada by merchants and families returning to the U.S. from Latin America, as we have encountered in our home investigations.

A stronger collaboration among clinicians, public health personnel, and the local community is needed to effectively address this emerging problem. Our current efforts are directed to reaching the growing Hispanic community in Southern Nevada through education, blood lead screening of high-risk children, and increased surveillance of lead-containing food

products. Similar to other reports,^{4,9} our preliminary data suggest that lead-tainted candy wrappers, straws, and containers may likely be sources of lead toxicity. Further investigation is needed to elucidate the effects of lead-tainted candy wrappers and their contribution to childhood lead poisoning.

This work was funded in part by a grant from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (grant #1H64EH000145-01) entitled the Clark County Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Program.

Shawn L. Gerstenberger, PhD^a
Glenn Savage, BS, REHS^b
Clayton Sellers, MS^b
Keith Zupnik, MD, REHS^b
Emmanuel C. Gorospe, MD^a

^aUniversity of Nevada Las Vegas School of Public Health, Department of Environmental and Occupational Health, Las Vegas, NV

^bSouthern Nevada Health District, Environmental Health Division, Las Vegas, NV

REFERENCES

1. Orange County Register. Toxic threats [cited 2007 Feb 10]. Available from: URL: <http://www.ocregister.com/investigations/lead>
2. Discovery Channel Canada. Not all candies are sweet [cited 2007 Feb 10]. Available from: URL: <http://www.exn.ca/dailyplanet/view.asp?date=11/30/2005>
3. Childhood lead poisoning associated with tamarind candy and folk remedies—California, 1999–2000. *MMWR Morb Mortal Wkly Rep* 2002;51(31):684-6.
4. Lynch RA, Boatright DT, Moss SK. Lead-contaminated imported tamarind candy and children's blood lead levels. *Public Health Rep* 2000;115:537-43.
5. Lead poisoning associated with imported candy and powdered food coloring—California and Michigan. *MMWR Morb Mortal Wkly Rep* 1998;47(48):1041-3.
6. Carter-Pokras O, Pirkle J, Chavez G, Gunter E. Blood lead levels of 4–11 year old Mexican American, Puerto Rican and Cuban children. *Public Health Rep* 1990;105:388-93.
7. Frisancho AR, Ryan AS. Decreased stature associated with moderate blood lead concentrations in Mexican-American children. *Am J Clin Nutr* 1991;54:516-9.
8. Rothweiler AM, Cabb EE, Gerstenberger SL. The status of childhood lead poisoning and prevention in Nevada, USA. *Scientific World Journal* 2007;7:479-92.
9. Hankin L, Heichel GH, Botsford RA. Lead on wrappers of specialty foods as a potential hazard for children. *Clin Pediatr (Phila.)* 1974; 13:1064-5.