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Frequently Asked Questions About Lead in Children's Jewelry

Q. How serious is the health risk of children's exposure to children's leaded jewelry?

A. Health effects related to lead exposure depend upon the nature and route of exposure to jewelry containing lead. If a child accidentally swallows a piece of leaded jewelry, the consequences could be fatal. Lead poisoning can have lifelong consequences on a child's cognitive development and affects virtually every organ system.

Q. What does jewelry containing lead look like?

A. The jewelry comes in a variety of forms that includes necklaces, medallions, bracelets and rings, sometimes imitating adult jewelry, sometimes designed as playful novelties. It may or may not be composed entirely of metal. Some items may appear to be painted or made of plastic. These items are generally inexpensive and they are displayed in a manner to appeal or be attractive to children. It is not possible to determine whether lead is in the jewelry by visual inspection.

Q. Should I be concerned about exposure to lead and health effects if my child has/had leaded jewelry?

A. Consult your child's pediatrician or other health care provider to discuss exposure concerns and to determine if your child should be screened for lead. Screening involves analysis of a small sample of your child's blood to determine the presence of lead.

Q. How often are children required to be screened for lead?

A. Under the mandatory lead screening program established by the Massachusetts Lead Law, all children in Massachusetts are required to be screened at ages one, two, and three, and again at four if they live in one of the communities determined by the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (MDPH) to be a high risk community for lead poisoning.

Q. What actions has the MDPH taken in the last several years to help reduce children's exposure to leaded jewelry?

A. In 2007, MDPH proposed a ban on leaded toy jewelry under the Massachusetts Hazardous Substances Regulations, due to the presence of lead detected in jewelry samples collected across the

Commonwealth. MDPH proposed bans related to the manufacture, transport or sale of toy jewelry containing a dangerous level of lead to protect Massachusetts children. Unfortunately, the federal Consumer Product Safety Improvement Act (CPSIA) signed by President Bush preempted any state that had not fully implemented regulations by August 14, 2008 from establishing their own regulations.

Q. How is the CPSIA different from the ban on leaded children's jewelry proposed by MDPH?

A. The new federal requirements are similar to the Massachusetts proposed regulations with regard to the total lead allowed in a product (starting with 600 parts per million and becoming more stringent over time), however the federal regulations do not include a standard for accessible lead, i.e. the amount of lead that comes out of a jewelry item in a child's mouth or stomach. MDPH considers lead accessibility to be important in order to protect children in the event that jewelry is swallowed. In addition to addressing lead in children's jewelry, the federal act also applies to lead and some phthalates in other children's products.

Q. What steps is MDPH taking in light of the new federal regulations?

A. MDPH plans to conduct random spot checks throughout the state to determine the presence of children's jewelry containing lead for sale in the Commonwealth and to ensure compliance with the new federal requirements. If items are found to be non-compliant, the Attorney General's office has authority to seek a court injunction to halt sales.

Q. What should I do with the jewelry that my child already has to determine if it contains lead?

A. Some private labs can test for lead content; however, the tests can be costly and will result in destruction of the jewelry piece. For those reasons, consumers may want to contact the store that the item was purchased to see if they have tested any of their products for lead content. In most cases consumers may elect to simply discard the item.

Q. What are the Massachusetts Lead Law's purpose and basic requirements?

A. The Massachusetts Lead Law protects children from lead poisoning by requiring that residences built before 1978 in which a child under six years of age resides be inspected for lead and abated if violations are found. Exposure to residential lead paint is responsible for the majority of cases of childhood lead poisoning in Massachusetts because of its prevalence in our older housing stock. When residential property is sold, the Law requires disclosure of its lead status to prospective purchasers and guarantees their right to a lead inspection. The Law also requires that every tenant in Massachusetts be given the Tenant Lead Law Notification before entering into a rental agreement.

Q. How can I learn more about childhood lead poisoning and the Massachusetts Lead Law?

A. The Bureau of Environmental Health's Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Program (CLPPP) website (www.mass.gov/dph/clppp.) has general information on lead poisoning, in addition to information on inspection and deleading services, community and statewide statistics on lead poisoning and legal documents for Property Transfer Notification and Tenant Lead Law Notification required by state and federal law. Documents can be downloaded or CLPPP can mail them to you upon request. CLPPP's public information number is (800) 532-9571.

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