

# Chief Health Officer Alert

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Status: Active

## Lead poisoning from imported Ayurvedic medicine

Some Ayurvedic medicines imported from India have been found to contain high levels of lead. High blood lead levels can lead to lead poisoning and can affect your health.

Over the past 18 months the department has been notified of three cases of elevated blood lead levels due to patients taking traditional Ayurvedic medications imported from India.

### Case 1

A 28 year old Indian-born male was hospitalised at an Ayurvedic Centre in India with back pain. He was administered multiple Ayurvedic medicines which he took for about 21 days. He brought the medication back with him to Melbourne and later visited his doctor because he was experiencing gastrointestinal pains, nausea and vomiting.

His blood lead level result was 85.75 µg/dL (4.14 µmol/L)\*.

An Ayurvedic tablet he was taking was analysed and found to contain 445 µg of lead.

### Case 2

A 30 year old Indian-born female had taken four Ayurvedic medicines for fertility over a three-month period.

These were purchased in India and imported into Australia by the patient's relatives. The patient then experienced a range of symptoms including nausea, vomiting and severe gastrointestinal pain.

Blood tests indicated that she had a blood lead level of 102.94 µg/dL (4.97 µmol/L)\*. One of the medicines analysed was found to contain 11.2 % lead by weight (maximum allowed lead level is 0.001%).

### Case 3

A 41 year old male took two types of Ayurvedic medicines given to him by a friend returning from India. He took these medicines daily for a year and after visiting his doctor he was found to have a blood lead level of 38.1 µg/dL (1.84 µmol/L)\*. Subsequent analysis of these medicines showed one of them to contain 2.2% lead by weight.

### Complementary medicines

Complementary medicines, such as Ayurvedic medicines, if sold in Australia are subject to regulation by the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA).

Imported Ayurvedic medicines may not be manufactured to the same quality and standards as medicines regulated in Australia.

No assurances can be given about the safety, quality or effectiveness of complementary medicines imported from India or other countries.

If you have experienced any unusual side-effects during or after taking complementary medicines imported from India or other countries, visit your doctor for an assessment and possible blood test.



Dr John Carnie  
Chief Health Officer

\* Threshold for reporting is 10 µg/dL (0.48 µmol/L), Schedule 4, Public Health and Wellbeing Regulations 2009