



Oakland County health sanitarian's work results in national recall

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NEWS RELEASE

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Oct. 29, 2018, Pontiac, Mich. – An Oakland County Health Division sanitarian's discovery of lead in 7.0-oz. plastic jars of Baraka curry powder and hot curry powder at the Oakland County home of a lead-poisoned child has resulted in a voluntary national recall. Senior Public Health Sanitarian Richard Peresky notified the Michigan Department of Health & Human Services and the Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development whose tests confirmed the presence of lead.

"Oakland County Health Division sanitarians are on the front lines of public health," Oakland County Executive L. Brooks Patterson said. "Whether they are visiting the county's 4,300 restaurants, wells, septic fields, or – as in this case – the home of a lead-poisoned child, their dedication and professionalism is serving the common good."

Peresky checked the imported spices in the pantry at the home of the lead-poisoned child because Oakland County Health Division has a history of discovering traces of lead in imported foods, especially spices. When one of the curry spices tested positive in a field test, Peresky did not stop there. He continued to test the other spices and found another curry product contained lead.

"Our health sanitarians are unsung heroes," Oakland County Health & Human Services

Director Kathleen Forzley said. "You don't hear about them because the actions they take are often preventative in nature. Richard's diligence in this instance, however, is having a nationwide impact. He exemplifies the excellence Oakland County sanitarians bring to the job every day."

Peresky, who has worked for Oakland County for 14 years, said the recall was a team effort. First, he had the assistance of Oakland County Public Health Nurse Nadia Batarseh who translated for the lead-poisoned child's family who do not speak English as a first language. Second, he worked with several partner government agencies to confirm his field test results and to take action with the outcome of a voluntary recall.

"This national recall is a result of cooperation among county, state and federal agencies along with the food distributor, importer and manufacturer," Peresky said. "The field testing sanitarians perform is merely the first step in a sequence of events that lead to a voluntary national recall."

The recall notice says that UBC Food Distributors Inc. is voluntarily recalling 7-oz. plastic jars of Barak hot curry powder and curry powder (UPC codes 822514265566 and 822514265535, respectively) due to a high level of lead found in the products. This product was purchased from an importer. The importer, along with the U.S. Food & Drug Administration, are now in the process of contacting the source of the product, so that corrective action can be taken on their part. Use of, or consumption of this product may elevate lead levels in the blood.

Lead is a toxic substance present in the environment in small amounts and everyone is exposed to some lead from daily actions such as inhaling dust, eating food, or drinking water. In general, the small exposure to lead within the U.S. population does not pose a significant public health concern.

Oakland County is not releasing any details about the lead-poisoned child because of health privacy laws. The Health Division routinely checks the results of lead data from blood tests performed at doctors' offices and hospitals. When a lead result is elevated, the Health Division responds to the home of an impacted individual to find the source of the lead so steps can be taken to mitigate it.

For media inquiries only, please contact Bill Mullan, Oakland County media and communications officer, at 248-858-1048.

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