

HALTON REGION HEALTH DEPARTMENT
OFFICE OF THE ASSOCIATE MEDICAL OFFICER OF HEALTH
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TO: Halton Physicians

Medical Chiefs of Staff: Joseph Brant Hospital, Halton Healthcare (Oakville, Milton and Georgetown Hospitals)
Chairs of: Family Practice, Paediatrics, Internal Medicine, Emergency, Obstetrics and Gynaecology, Surgery
Chief of Laboratory Services and Infection Control Practitioners

POST IN: Emergency Department and Physicians Lounge

FROM: Dr. Joanna Oda, Associate Medical Officer of Health

DATE: February 11, 2019

RE: Lead and other heavy metals exposure from Ayurvedic medicines

Clinicians should be alert to the use of traditional and herbal medicines, including Ayurvedic medicines, among their patients. On January 28, 2019, Health Canada issued a warning about various medicinal products sold by A1 Herbal Ayurvedic Clinic Ltd., an Ayurvedic clinic in Surrey, B.C., with an affiliated clinic in Brampton, Ontario. Health Canada seized and confiscated a number of medicines after a case of lead poisoning was linked to products sold at that establishment and online.

Ayurveda is a form of traditional medicine originating in India and South Asia. It can involve the ingestion of preparations that have been documented to contain heavy metals, particularly lead, mercury and arsenic.

Clinicians are advised to remain vigilant for the use of such medicines in their patients and order a blood lead level (BLL) if lead toxicity is suspected. Depending on the degree of toxicity, patients with elevated BLLs may appear asymptomatic or may exhibit a range of signs and symptoms.

Signs and symptoms of lead toxicity:

- Abdominal pain, ranging from occasional discomfort, to diffuse pain, to “lead colic” (severe, intermittent abdominal cramps)
- Constitutional symptoms, primarily fatigue and general malaise
- Anemia
- Neurological dysfunction including poor concentration and peripheral motor neuropathy

Chronic lead exposure can have long term sequelae, including chronic interstitial nephritis, adverse reproductive effects, and neurological deficits related to learning, attention, especially in children.

What to do:

Clinicians may consult the following for guidance on assessment and management:

- Ontario Poison Centre: 1-800-268-9017 (416-813-5900)
- Occupational and Environmental Health Clinic at St Michael’s Hospital: 416-864-5074
- Halton Region Health Department for assistance on investigating potential sources of lead exposure where the BLL is >0.48 µmol/L (10 µg/dL). Call 311, 905-825-6000 or toll free at 1-866-442-5866

For the full Health Canada alert, please visit: <https://healthycanadians.gc.ca/recall-alert-rappel-avis/hc-sc/2019/68940a-eng.php>.

Please report all suspected or confirmed cases of [Diseases of Public Health Significance](#) (formerly Reportable Diseases) to the Halton Region Health Department as soon as possible. Diseases marked * should be reported immediately by telephone (24 hours a day, 7 days a week) or fax (Mon-Fri, 8:30 am – 4:30 pm only). Other diseases can be reported the next working day. Call 311, 905-825-6000 or toll free at 1-866-442-5866. For general information, please visit halton.ca.

If any link provided in this memo does not work, please cut and paste it into your web browser.