

Get the LEAD Out

A Bay Area Coalition of Lead Poisoning Prevention Leaders

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Group Releases Tips for Lead-Safe Holidays

Coalition Encourages Alternatives to Metal and Plastic Toys

Shoppers were encouraged today to consider alternatives to traditional plastic, metal or vinyl toys this season to protect small children from lead exposure.

The recommendation and practical advice to parents and other shoppers comes from Dr. Lynn Ramirez-Avila, Chief Pediatric Resident at San Francisco General Hospital, who will speak at a press conference on behalf of *Get the Lead Out*, a coalition of lead poisoning prevention leaders from 11 counties in the Bay Area and Northern California. The press conference is scheduled at the San Francisco Public Library, 100 Larkin St., (at Grove), Koret Auditorium, located on the Library's lower level at 10:00 a.m. on November 7. (no refreshments in auditorium).

The coalition is concerned because more than a dozen toy recalls were issued in recent months by the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission by large toy companies, such as Mattel, Fisher-Price and Toys-R-Us. Toys tainted with lead include some Barbie toys, wooden coloring cases, die-cast train sets and children's metal jewelry. Even low levels of lead exposure in small children may cause learning or growth problems.

"Many of these toy companies seem to be responding to the problem of lead in these imported toys," Dr. Ramirez-Avila said. "But we simply do not know if all the lead-contaminated toys, jewelry, and other products are off the shelves in all locations. And we do not know if there will be any additional recalls because of lead contamination. We are aware that one child has died from swallowing a lead-containing charm, so we are taking this issue very seriously."

Get the Lead Out released a list of alternatives to traditional plastic or metal toys and *10 Tips for a Lead-Safe Holiday*. (Available online at <http://cchealth.org>). Some of the alternatives are special family outings or time together, books or clothing. "Think about toys you can make yourself or movies or music

Coalition members include representatives from:

Alameda County ▪ City of Berkeley ▪ City and County of San Francisco ▪ Contra Costa County ▪ Marin County ▪ Monterey County
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or sports equipment. A special walk to the park, baking a batch of cookies or reading an exciting book to your child are all wonderful gifts. They are the gifts of yourself,” Dr. Ramirez-Avila said.

She noted that lead has been found in some toys and other products containing vinyl, soft or hard plastic or metal. She listed some vinyl lunch boxes, children’s metal jewelry, products purchased from vending machines, and Christmas tree ornaments.

The group urged parents to check the Consumer Product Safety Commission (www.cpsc.gov) to find out if specific toys have been recalled and, if they have, to return them to the store where they were purchased. “Be vigilant. Be careful what you buy,” Dr. Ramirez-Avila said. “Remember that there are safe things families can give.

She recommended that parents check their small children’s toys for bite marks, fading, breaks in the painted surfaces or other signs of wear and that they replace worn toys. She said that parents should also wash toys regularly to remove household dust, which may contain lead from damaged or deteriorating lead-based paint. Lead-based paint in houses built before 1978 is still the most common source of lead exposure for children.

The coalition cautioned that, if parents purchase a home test kit, they should be aware that these kits only test what is on the surface and results can be unreliable.

“But parents should get rid of any toys that test positive,” Dr. Ramirez-Avila said. If they think their child has been exposed to lead, she said, parents should ask their doctors for a simple blood test.

Get the Lead Out is a newly formed coalition of county lead poisoning prevention agencies, environmental health organizations and interested citizens. It includes all the lead poisoning prevention programs in the greater Bay Area.

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