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Contact: Deborah Davis  
505-827-2619, 470-2290

## Department of Health Launches Public Education Campaign About Lead Dangers

To educate the public about lead in Mexican candies, the New Mexico Department of Health distributed about 1,000 posters titled, "Toxic Treats," to public elementary schools, Head Start programs and Women, Infants and Children (WIC) programs throughout the state.

The colorful, informative posters show pictures of 14 food products that contain lead and list 40 other candies that have tested high for lead. It also includes information about ways to avoid lead, get tested for lead levels and symptoms of lead exposure.

The Orange County Register, a newspaper in Orange County, Calif., produced the poster as a part of a six-part investigation into lead in candy. The Department of Health reprinted the posters with the newspaper's permission to create more public awareness about products found in New Mexico that may pose a health risk, such as Tama Roca candy, Vero Mango, Vero Rebanaditas and Lucas Limon, a lemon/lime salt.

"Public education is an important component of what we do at the Department of Health," said Michelle Lujan Grisham, secretary of the Department of Health. "We encourage health-care providers to test children for lead levels and advise parents to keep these products away from their children."

The Department of Health gives public presentations to educators, health-care professionals, pregnant teens and teen mothers about lead prevention. The predominant source of high lead levels in New Mexico appears to come from lead-based paint that is chipping or peeling.

Department staff collects results of lead testing in New Mexico. All children enrolled in Medicaid are required by law to be tested at 12 and 24 months. If children test high for lead, the department visits their home with a lead risk assessor to measure lead levels and educate the family about ways to reduce lead exposure.

Lead can damage a child's central nervous system, kidneys and reproductive system. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports that nearly 500,000 children in the United States have lead levels in their blood that are high enough to cause irreversible damage to their health.

Symptoms include decreased appetite, fatigue, headaches, abdominal pain, vomiting, constipation, weight loss and difficulty concentrating. For further information about lead exposure and testing, call Julianne Vollmer with the New Mexico Lead Poisoning Prevention Program at 476-3586 or 1-800-879-3421.

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