A story involving a toxic teething product is being reported by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). But, this time it's not a part of the ongoing investigation by FDA into homeopathic teething tablets that contain high levels of belladonna.

No - this time, it's bracelets filled with lead.

Because lead can be extremely toxic - especially to babies - some areas of the country do routine blood tests in young children. Last fall, one of these identified a 9 month old in Manchester, Connecticut with a high lead level (41 ?g/dL (levels exceeding 5 ?g/dL are abnormal)). This is a high blood lead level - approaching the level where treatments such as chelation therapy are considered.

Lead is a neurotoxin and can cause damage to the brain and nervous system, slowed growth and development, learning and behavior problems and hearing and speech problems.

How does a baby end up with such high lead levels? Usually, by ingesting it. Although lead is not put into paint anymore, in some places in the country - including New England - the old paint in houses still contains lead. When the old paint chips and flakes off, kids may end up eating the chips. Although this infant's house was old (built in 1926) and this type of paint was found on some of the windows, it was ruled out as the baby did not have access to it. In addition, her brothers and sisters had normal blood levels.
The investigation looked elsewhere for the source of lead and found in a “homeopathic magnetic hematite healing bracelet” that had been bought for the baby at a local fair. These bracelets are sold to offer supposed teething relief when a baby chews/sucks on it. But, when the bracelets are made with metal beads that contain lead, teething becomes the least of that family’s concerns. The beads from the bracelet were tested and found to be positive for lead.

Since the bracelet came from a local craft fair, there is no record of the makers. No vendor records. No source.

We realize that this is one case, and we are not suggesting that people stop enjoying their local artisanal fairs. That said, I am covering these stories about babies who are sick or even worse - died - from toxic teething products all too frequently. I understand the desire to want to soothe a baby’s fussiness and discomfort while teething. But, for this particular issue, less is more and sticking to the FDA’s recommendations of cold cloths is the safest route.

References:

1) Garcia P and Hale J *Notes from the Field*: Lead Poisoning in an Infant Associated with a Metal Bracelet — Connecticut, 2016 *Weekly / September 1, 2017 / 66(34);916*

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