Guarding Against The Hidden Danger: Lead Poisoning Prevention With Lead Safe Mama Transcript

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Introduction and Lead Advocacy

Welcome back to ADHD, Autism and Chronic Disease Parenting Summit. I'm here with the fantastic Tamara Reuben, who is the founder of Lead Safe Mama, a lead advocate, warrior for kids health.

Thank you so much for being here. I'm always excited to chat with you. Thanks for having me. This is exciting to do this again, too. So lead is really in the news these days.

I mean, you've picked you've picked the topic and I don't know if you've created a lot of the buzz or whether it's just, you know, you happen to be ahead of the the times, I guess a little bit with this.

You've been you've been, you know, fighting the good fight for a long time in terms of lead. And I guess maybe we can start with why is that a problem?

Why should parents be concerned about this, and why should we be mindful of lead in our products? Because, you know, as people probably have been aware, it's been talked about in baby food.

It's been talked about in cups and, and other things that have kind of hit the news. But this isn't new to you or to me as a pediatrician. Yeah, it's not new.

And the most important thing is that, LED is behind a lot of the developmental disabilities that we're seeing today, and it's discounted by, even a lot of pediatricians who aren't familiar with the issue, as well as others in fields related to the concern.

So people might see, like educators, for example, or, you know, teachers, special ed, groups and anywhere you might go to seek help for a child with learning disabilities.

So it's important to first have a preventative approach to lead exposure because you don't know what the symptoms are going to look like, and they don't occur until later.

So my children were acutely lead poisoned as infants. Abby was seven months old, and his symptomatic expression didn't start showing up until he was three.

And but at that point, that's kind of too late because it causes frontal lobe impairments and developmental disabilities related to frontal lobe impairments.

So if we can do what we can as parents for preventative measures, then we're going to be, you know, setting our kids out to have the best possible outcome, both from an educational perspective and also from their physiological potential implications that that they might have as a result of that exposure.

So just, in terms of symptoms, the first and most important thing is that when your child has lead exposure, that usually isn't any symptom.

Why Lead Exposure Matters for Children

And the problem with that also is that the symptoms that might come up kind of resemble the terrible twos, you know, cranky and irritable headaches and, lack of interest in eating things like that.

And I often think about, oh, well, I wonder Pre-industrial Revolution before we had this, you know, pervasiveness of

lead exposure in our environment.

Did we have a terrible twos? Do you know anything about that? When the terrible twos became a thing? I don't know when it became a thing. I feel like it's probably always, always been a thing.

I feel like that's that's a part of development too. So I, I feel like it's, you know, but but the thing is that I think is interesting. It's a terrible twos.

It's not really the terrible twos. Right. It's like you know, a lot of a lot of parents and actually have kids are like oh 3 or 4 is worse. Or maybe like one one is kind of where the terrible twos are.

So I think, you know, maybe, maybe it's, it's a more recent thing in terms at least, like the buzz with the name. I don't know. Yeah. So so people need to be on the lookout for those kind of symptoms that they might otherwise, just associate with, behavioral stage and, that that's part of the confusing piece of it.

And then later in life, you know, when they're hitting school age is when you start seeing developmental disabilities that impact their learning, which is the ADHD PhD.

And also a lot of misdiagnosis of the autism that comes from kiddos who have the cluster of symptoms associated with lead exposure. So in order to prevent that, we want to try and limit their exposure as much as possible.

And the thing I think since the pandemic, when we when I did the last interview with you, was like at the beginning of the pandemic, we were doing we did an interview in person, like, and then the world exploded.

And so since, the pandemic, there's been a lot, more kind of panic around health concerns that young mothers have especially, but also young parents. And so people started getting, upset that, oh, that is everywhere or I can't do anything about it.

And the thing I'd like to stress is that it's not everywhere. There are less free alternatives for a lot of things, and if you can make sure your home is lead free, especially at the interior of your home and your kitchen's lead free, and your child's bedroom is lead free, if those things are focused on, then you know you can manage any potential incidental exposures that you can't control out in the world.

Like, the a common one I get asked about is, well, what about walking past someone, shooting off fireworks and my kid inhaled fireworks fumes like, well, that's not something I worry about because you can't control that.

But you can make sure you have that free dishes and make sure you don't have any antique toys in your home. And make sure that your home has had a LED hazard assessment if it's a pre 1978.

So, so, you know, there's a basis for going about this without panic. And the, the main, piece of that is that it's all rooted in science. So if you can find science to support your concerns.

So if you have concerns about your house, get some testing of your home using dust wipe sampling. Get your water tested. If you have concerns about your toys, research the certificates of analysis for those toys and make sure that they were tested and deemed to be compliant with current regulations.

Don't buy cheap knockoff toys off of Amazon. Try and limit you know, the things that come into your home and make sure they're safe and educational and stimulating.

But but most important, that they don't have any toxic home. So that's a good place to start. It doesn't have to be panic, you know. Yeah, that's great.

Great advice. And and I, I couldn't agree more because yeah I mean obviously we want to avoid any toxin as much as we can. But luckily we're built in a way that we have great detoxification systems.

And, you know, we have kidneys and livers and we can pee and poop and sweat and we get things out. And we've always been exposed to some sort of toxins, you know, forever.

So our bodies can handle a small amount of whatever comes our way in general. But it's just like you said, it's the things that are chronic that are going to usually end up being much more of a concern if you're touching a a LED plate every day, eating out of something that has lead in it, using a fork or playing with a toy every single day, then it's that chronic low grade exposure over time that builds up and that is generally where we see issues.

Preventing Exposure at Home and in Products

And as a pediatrician and I'm sure, you know, you can speak to this more, but as a patrician, a lot of times when somebody does the blood testing, they find lead in the blood.

Then after, you know, whatever extensive research they go through to figure out what it is, it's some sort of common thing in their home that they find.

And if they get rid of that thing, then the blood level goes down, whether sometimes it's like a food that they're eating or, you know, a plate like you mentioned.

And it's amazing how fast the blood level can, can go down over time. Once you once you figure it out. So the chronic low grade exposure seems to be, you know, where the the best bang for your buck is in terms of focusing on that.

And preventing it. Yeah. And one of the things that I've seen again since the pandemic, a lot, also in conjunction with a lot of health trends where, you know, maybe parents were more focused on their kids diet and their kids overall health than they've been previously a couple of months ago.

And I don't know if you're editing me. So you are just a background noise. I can't hear it sounds okay. Okay, well, let's let me wait for them to go by and, It's kind of noisy here.

Okay. If it's not that not bothering on your end. Okay. So one of the things that I've seen since the pandemic is, that there's been a lot of, focus on alternate diets, like alternative diets that might, make your child healthier or deal with, issues like inflammation or or other concerns.

Allergies that people have. And I just recently wrote about some testing that we did of cassava based products because during the pandemic, I worked with no fewer than eight families who had mysterious sources of exposure where, they called me, they had a zoom consult with me because they couldn't figure out where their child's lead exposure was coming from.

And when they, we talked through their daily routine, we talked through their home. We looked around their home. You zoom in the zoom calls. Sorry. I just got really lazy.

I'm so sorry. Like in a quiet hall where there shouldn't be any people that really know. Okay, hopefully. Well, let's let some of these people go by. So the the, the families contacted me with low level exposures that they couldn't determine the source of the, this happened frequently when those families lived in a new construction home.

And so what, we were seeing is it wasn't a housing, exposure. It wasn't toys because, you know, they're nationally minded, conscious, parents. And in in so many cases, it ended up being the cassava based diets or the, wheat alternative based diets that tended to heavily emphasize cassava.

And so we did some cassava testing and we found, lead levels above what the scientific recommendation is for exposure to lead in food in these cassava based products.

And one of the flowers that was tested for one of the families was over 900 parts per billion lead, and that that particular flour product was being used on a daily basis for this child, because the family was focusing, on a

monoculture diet based on the recommendation of their either their pediatrician or their nutritionist.

And they, the nutritionists and pediatricians don't have, the understanding that that's what's going to come of their advice. So I'd love for you to talk about that.

But like the they'll recommend, okay, you should have these foods, these foods and these foods, and you shouldn't have these foods, but they don't say to the family, only eat this, but the family thinks, oh, well, I've got a toddler.

I can't think straight. I'm going to focus and I'm going to we're going to make everything out of this because they said that was okay. And so then they start eating just one thing or one type of food as a primary food item, and then the child can become exposed if that food item is is a highlighted item.

Yeah. I think that's a really, really good point. And something that I do try to emphasize a lot when talking about food is is variety, right. Because you just never know what is going to have what chemical or toxin.

And it doesn't matter how good you think you're eating or how noble you might be in terms of your pursuit of of health or natural wellness, you know, just like you said, like somebody could be eating cassava flour thinking, well, that's much better than eating, you know, GMO wheat or something like that.

And it's like, then you're eating a whole bunch of lead. And just like that happens to be from the plate. Not every obviously, every cassava flour is going to have it in every sort of products going to have it, but you just never know what's going to be in what.

And so variety tends to at least give you some buffer there. Because the reality is our food sucks. And, and, you know, our lifestyles are filled with toxins and, and you just don't always know.

And you may not be able to predict exactly where it's coming from. I mean, yes, if you have like some old China or something like that.

Food Sources and Cassava Concerns

Yeah, maybe that's, you know, more likely to have something, but you're not going to think like, oh, the carrots that I'm eating were dipped in lid. Oh yes.

So you know, you're not going to think that kind of thing. But but who knows what's in the the farm fields where you're getting your food from. And if you eat from the same farm every day with the same food, or you buy the same package, then you never know what the what's what's what's in there. So I think that's a really good, you know, very, poignant, actionable tip for parents.

This is variety. Yeah. And the thing about that as well is that, there's there's I think we talked about this when we first met, but, there's a lot of industry influence, and lobbying, and there's a huge lobbying push from, the packaged, processed food industry to say that all of our soil is contaminated, that the contaminants are coming from our soil.

But when you do independent testing of soil, and I do a lot of soil testing using XRF technology, you don't find levels of lead at levels that would contaminate the food in the ranges that we're finding in the package and processed food, it's really coming from a combination of sources.

There may be a little coming from a growing, but it's more so coming from the packaging and processing and, the machines that they use to package and process the foods, and especially when there's multiple items that are ground.

So say there's a dried bone broth and there's a dried kazam cassava and there's dried herbs and spices. When you have all of these different things, each has potential sources of exposure for contamination by metals, mercury, lead, cadmium and arsenic.

And then you combine them into a product together. Well, it's more likely to have, contaminants. So you have to always remember that, that, our, our government is influenced by lobbyists in various industries.

And right now the packaged food industry is a very powerful industry. And so, yes, some carrots or sweet potatoes test positive for lead. But if you wash your carrots well, if you and you peel them well and you peel and wash your sweet potatoes, the levels of lead are not anywhere near as measurable as they are in these packaged and processed food choices.

So I think that that adding fresh food to the your kid's diet. But to the degree that you can or making these things at home. So they are being processed offsite in some factory where you don't know what's going on.

That's a good tip as well. I love that. Can we spend a minute and I want to get to talking about what you do specifically, but before we get there, can you just maybe spend a minute or two talking about over the last year or two, what are some of the big offenders for LED that you've come across things that you want people to think about.

You mentioned some foods. But what are the other things that people should be thinking about, like maybe as a major category? Like, I know there's there's like baby food, there's baby bottles.

You know what? What are what are the things that you've noticed are the big, big offenders for lead that people should be really mindful to like, oh, I should look into this, make sure it's lead free or the best that I can can do.

Well, I've been reporting on lead paint on baby bottles for since like 2016, and I've also been reporting on lead used in the ceiling of the stainless steel insulated baby bottles since around that time as well.

And we've been trying to get a lot of these product free products recalled from the Consumer Product Safety Commission because they are a violation of the Consumer Product Safety Improvement Act of 2008.

And the first, sorry, the most frustrating thing is that the Consumer Product Safety Commission is overwhelmed. Or maybe they don't you don't have enough staff.

I don't know what the problems are, or maybe they're mired in the process, but they're not issuing recalls for these products. So I have on my website a lot of the products listed that should be have been recalled.

One of them is like the Zach designs, insulated stainless steel cups for the bottoms pop off and regular use. Another one that came up and this a little bit, went a little crazy was the Stanley Cups. The Stanley Tumblers.

And the interesting thing about that is that a lot of the news media tried to make it seem like, oh, well, these don't fall, the bottom doesn't fall off, the lead isn't exposed.

But in fact, the bottoms fall off because they're glued on. They're not soldered on. Some, some, news media is mis, informed about that at mass.

Major Lead Offenders in Consumer Products

And these items are sold as, that you can put them in your washing machine and so safe to put in the washing machine, and after you put them in the washing machine, three or 4 or 5 times the glue on the bottom that's covering the lead is, dissolved, and then the bottom just pops off.

And, you know, families contact me with that information to know that the bottom disc popped off all the time. And so it is a real exposure risk of a child's using that product.

And then the secondary piece of that is, Stanley also makes children's products. And those are actually violation of the Consumer Product Safety Improvement Act.

So I submitted a violation report for Stanley Products. I don't know, like a month or two ago and we still haven't heard from the CPS, see about whether or not those are going to go ahead with the recall.

And I tell people, follow my website to, find out about recalls, months and sometimes years before they happen. For example, the, we reported on my website, which is lead safe, mama.com.

We reported the knock baby bottles being a problem. 18 months before they were finally recalled, we reported the green spout sprouts, insulated stainless steel sippy cup, baby bottles, months before they were recalled.

And then we also, let's see, we reported the cup. Can last January, year and a year ago January. And then they weren't recalled until July. So, you know, that was like a seven month delay from when the CPSC knew about the issue.

And the company knows about the issue. The company should be issuing a voluntary recall for these products. And they're not. So, you know, in general, I say, you know, keep an eye on insulated stainless steel products because many of them have left their outlet free ones.

Hydro flask makes lead free options, Ocala makes lead free options. And some of the other brands make lead free options, but any of the hand-me-down products you might have had that that are still circulating and, were made, before all of this, attention in the news media happened.

They might have might have led if they're insulated stainless steel. And the other issue is the baby bottles that have lead paint on them. And unfortunately, for nursing mothers, these are the bottles that are pushed for nursing mothers who need an alternative or a break or, you know, are pumping in, are, supplementing with pumping or formula, but are primarily nursing.

And those two brands are Pidgeon and Lance Eno. And we've reported, Lance and o to the CPSC. And there has been no recall and they're painted with lead paint and the pigeon, the bottles are it's the same company.

So they're using the same lead paint. And then the new the crazy thing is. So basically look for these brands. You can look them up on my website on my baby bottle guide.

It's free. There's no advertisements. You can just look up the different baby bottles and see what the test results are, and find out if they've been tested and if they tested positive for lead.

The frustrating thing is, like pigeon, we informed them that they had lead around 18 months ago and or maybe it's been two years already. Time flies. And so now they're making lead painted baby bottles that they're dipping in silicone.

So the silicone is a layer between the lead, and the baby's hand. But the problem is it's still illegal. It's still then becomes a substrate issue. So you've got lead paint as a substrate, and if the silicone coating gets scratched or worn at all, then it's exposing the lead paint underneath.

I don't know why they didn't just remove the lead paint. Why are they so. The cheaper material. More vibrant colors maybe. I mean, the thing is, a lot of brands have let it free paint and like the Avon baby bottles are lead free.

The natural satin baby bottles use a white lead free paint. The bibs baby bottles are lead free, so there's a lot of lead free baby bottles out there and, even ones with painted markings.

But I think they like the vibrant colors, and they're hoping that that'll sell to more young mothers. Because they're like, oh, my baby will be able to identify this baby bottle because it's got these bright colors.

But the interesting thing is, you know, we were responsible for that initial knock recall, but they only recalled one of the designs. And in fact, we reported six different nut designs, and they essentially ignored the other designs, even though they all have lead paint.

But now, I've been traveling in Europe since November 6th, so I've been on the lookout for baby bottles in stores and to see, you know what? The differences here, and the nut bottles are made in Germany.

And, when I was in Germany, I bought a bunch of glass knock baby bottles that were painted with brightly colored designs and their new ones are live free.

So, you know, even if they're not, acknowledging the problem of the past manufacturer, which they are not other diminishing the the concern and saying it was only a small amount of bottles, which isn't true.

They switched their manufacturing process as a result of this work. So that's been really great. And it's a community collaborative effort. Like I don't have babies anymore.

My kids are 15, 19, 21, and 27. So I know what baby bottles to test because let's see if mama community members, let me know what they want, tested, what they're using, what's popular.

And so they help, inform the testing we do, which is really wonderful. And, and a key part of, of the nature of this advocacy work is that it's a community collaborative initiative.

You're making a huge difference. I mean, you make waves to people don't like you think you see they come afterwards. You kind of have a funny, you know, social media feel.

And in a way it's not funny, but it's like, you know, they come after you and then you're always like, you're very straightforward. You're like, well, I did it. This is what I did.

You know, you guys don't like it too bad, you know? And then it seemed like it kind of, you know, the way. But your advocacy work makes such a big difference.

You know, you're doing it just out of the goodness of your heart. Really? And I know that a lot of stuff that's done in this way is kind of done because people pay people to do it, or, you know, they're kind of saying it's not advertised, but it really is. And that's not true for you.

You're just doing it because you care. Which I think makes makes such a difference. I mean, obviously you have, you know, family, reasons why why it's kind of an important issue for you.

Testing, Consultations, and Community Outreach

But at this point, you know, you're really taken up as a mission and made such a big difference for so many families that you've been just like you said, you know, maybe the company doesn't acknowledge it, but if they make a change and that's that's still kind of a positive at the end of the day.

And really, what we want the other day anyways is, you know, we don't want people to get in trouble so much as to make better products so that it's safer for kids.

So it's. Fascinating, you know, it's it's I mean, I it's, it's I find it amusing that at this point because I've, I've been my son was poisoned, almost 19 years ago.

And, so I've been doing this work a long time. I started doing xref testing in 2009, and I used to get really upset when I would get a cease and desist letter from a company threatening me, and I'd be like, wait a second.

I didn't share anything wrong. I shared science, my science is replicable, and it's the same instrumentation used by the consumer product safety Commission.

So thank you for your cease and desist letter, and let me publish that on my website. And, you know, see you later. And that happened in October because I reported the pure Kiki baby bottles that were manufactured and sold through 2018, because I've still been finding those in families homes, because they hold onto them.

And there have been hand-me-downs. And even though, you know, that's six years ago now, and they say that they've been making lab free products since then, the original lead contaminated products were never recalled.

So I published the very specific details about the products that hadn't been recalled. And then purist sent me a cease and desist letter, which I also published on my website, because I'm like, you know, these just because it's six years in, in the life of a baby, six years like, oh my, that's like a long time ago.

But these products are they're durable and they stick around. So, you might still come across them. That's why I say, you know, be careful about the hand-me-down products.

And let's try and get these older products recalled, even if they're, you know, maybe not. For the current round of babies that are happening in the world right now.

No, I make such a big difference. And you do travel around at times and do house visits, I know, so maybe you can tell people, you know, before we go again where they can find you, your website.

It's like I would say the most extensive website for, for any lead information. So I think anybody parents should have that saved as a bookmark if they're looking at products.

But if somebody does want to work with you, if they found, you know, let in their blood and they just they've been on the test and they can't figure it out.

And maybe they're like, I need somebody who really knows what they're doing to get in here. And then how do people get hold of you? Yeah. So my website, let's say if mom and com or Tamara ruben.com, they go to the same place.

And what I do is I use xref technology in home consultation with family and the families like not only look for lead, but I look for cadmium and mercury and antimony.

So I've worked with several families whose children had antimony poisoning, and we found the sources of their antimony. And, often it's from a bathtub or a mattress or something, but something that, you know, is overlooked by, a health care practitioner or the health department if they come in and try and find the source of these things.

So I, cluster my home consultations around the country a couple months each year. This year, I'm primarily going to be doing May and June. I, I'm unexpectedly flying to New York on Sunday because I'm going to be and the national news about the baby bottle issue, which is something I've been working on for a while.

So I'm really excited about that. So when I, when I travel, I posted on my social media and let people know where I'm going to be and I'm coming to New York, I mean, sorry, I'm going to be in California in June. And, and I do one on one consultations where we test everything in your house.

We look around at potential sources and we try and, identify the risks. Now, it's wonderful to help families who are in crisis, who can't find sources of exposure.

But I also like doing the preventative, visits where families are concerned about making sure that their child doesn't get poisoned in the first place.

And I think that's the best place to start. And, so you can look up on my website about my home consultations, and I do zoom consultations too, that are often really helpful.

But the other thing that I really enjoy doing is community outreach events. So, people can work with their church or their synagogue or their local community center and have me come in and do free consumer goods testing for their entire community, usually sponsored by a local business or by the local health departments, something like that.

So that's fun to and I just want to say, I'm really excited. If people want to follow my website, sign up for my

newsletter. I'm going to be doing monthly food testing now because I have a new partner in, Simple Labs.

Do you know them? I know the names of beloved. Yeah, definitely seen that. They run tap score, which is the water testing company. That so. Yeah. That's right. Yeah.

They're going to be working with me to do testing of food periodically. And so if people have concerns about food they want tested, they should definitely chime in when I post, but that we're going to be doing a new round.

So I have an idea what what kinds of things people want tested. And the other thing I'm test is prenatal vitamins. So I'm really excited about that as well. That's good.

Very good. Well, thank you for for everything that you do. I mean, you really have helped out a lot of kids and continue to help out a lot of kids and families.

And you really are blazing a trail when it comes to lead. So I really appreciate and thank you everyone for for listening. Thank you.