

## Elevated Lead Levels Found in Children's Fruit Pouches: Anatomy of a Recall

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Reports of a recall of apple cinnamon fruit pouches for children have been prominent in the headlines for the last few weeks. This blog has previously covered the topics of **lead in spices** and the FDA's January 2023 issuance of **draft guidance for action levels for lead** in food for infants and children. The recall of apple cinnamon fruit pouches marries both those topics with the drama of an international puzzle to decipher.

In late October of this year, **Wanabana USA voluntarily recalled** Wanabana Apple Cinnamon Fruit Purée pouches due to reports of lead poisoning in children who consumed the product. The investigation began in North Carolina where **testing of four children showed elevated blood lead levels, which raised concerns for potential acute lead toxicity**. As of mid- November 2023, there were **34 illnesses** reported which may be associated with the recalled Wanabana products. Not surprisingly, the filing of the **first lawsuit** came quickly upon the heels of the recall.

**Investigation into what could be causing the elevated lead levels, identified fruit pouches as a common denominator amongst the children**. The investigation began because North Carolina law

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requires that laboratories report all lead test results for children under the age of six. If elevated levels of lead are confirmed, then North Carolina law requires an investigation to determine the source of the lead. During that investigation, Wanabana apple cinnamon fruit pouches were identified as containing elevated lead levels. The recall was later expanded to Schnucks cinnamon apple pouches and Weis cinnamon apple pouches. Schnucks and Weis sell Wanabana cinnamon apples fruit pouches under their own private label brands. The Schnucks and Weis brands apple cinnamon fruit pouches were recalled even though there were no reports of lead poisoning related to their products.

The hunt then began for the source of the lead in the apple cinnamon fruit pouches. Analyses of various varieties of fruit pouches showed that the elevated lead was present only in fruit pouches containing cinnamon – leading regulators to suspect cinnamon as the source of the lead. USApple, a group representing apple producers in the U.S. issued a press release on November 7, 2023, regarding the recalled cinnamon apple fruit pouches. Citing Schnucks, USApple reported “there were ‘elevated levels of lead found in the cinnamon raw material.’” USApple added:

Since 1990, the FDA has published an annual report on certain contaminants found in U.S. food products and no apples, apple juice, or apple products has been found to have any level of lead that would be of concern. The FDA’s Total Diet Study from 2018-2020 also shows no lead detected in fresh apples, apple juice and baby food applesauce.

Toxic lead levels in other cinnamon products, including the spice cinnamon, have not been reported. However, in an effort to protect public safety, the FDA decided to screen cinnamon imports for

lead. To date, the FDA has not reported any cinnamon imports with concerning levels of lead.

Wanabana apple cinnamon products are manufactured by **Austrofood**, a food manufacturer in Ecuador. In light of the Wanabana recall, Austrofood **announced** that it had tested its products and lead was not detected in any products sold in Ecuador. Austrofood further stated that it had tested all of its product lines and found no lead contamination. Regarding the lead tainted apple cinnamon products identified in the U.S., Austrofood stated that the contamination was due to a raw ingredient not produced by Austrofood.

The source of the lead-tainted cinnamon has not yet been publicly identified, but all the companies impacted are working with regulators to identify the lead source and protect the health of the public. The search for that final piece of the puzzle continues.

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