

California Bans Cadmium In Children's Jewelry

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LOS ANGELES (AP) — California became the largest U.S. state to limit the toxic metal cadmium in children's jewelry on Monday, effectively creating a new national standard ahead of promised federal action.

Lawmakers and public health officials have worried that kids who suck or bite jewelry containing cadmium — a known carcinogen — could suffer long-term poisoning, including problems with their kidneys and bones. Some research also suggests that cadmium can, like lead, harm the development of young brains.

Cadmium became a substitute for lead in children's metal jewelry after Congress effectively banned the use of lead following a series of safety scares over products made in China. An Associated Press investigation earlier this year revealed that some Chinese manufacturers began substituting cadmium for lead in products exported to the U.S.

Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger signed into law a bill that will limit cadmium in jewelry for kids 6 and under to no more than three-hundredths of a percent starting in 2012. One piece of jewelry tested during AP's investigation was 91 percent cadmium.

Connecticut, Illinois and Minnesota also have passed cadmium-in-jewelry laws this year, and legislation has been introduced in both houses of Congress. The volume of goods sold in California and the state's influence over national markets means that even absent action at the federal level, the U.S. now has a cadmium limit.

Representatives of the Fashion Jewelry and Accessories Trade Association, which represents the U.S. industry, could not be reached for comment after business hours Monday.

The group has lobbied state legislatures against enacting bans, arguing that legally binding limits on the total amount of cadmium in jewelry is too strict an approach. Instead, the group's leaders want a voluntary national standard that would assess how much cadmium can escape from jewelry if a child chews or sucks on it, rather than how much cadmium the jewelry contains.

The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission has been preparing new limits for jewelry that adopt this "accessibility" approach. Details of that standard are expected soon, though it's unclear whether it will be enforced immediately or will go through an extended rule-making process. Current federal law restricts cadmium in toys, not jewelry.

The commission already has orchestrated recalls of hundreds of thousands of necklaces and bracelets sold at national chain stores.

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