



Dutchess County Department of Health Public Health Advisory*

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Calabash Chalk Found Containing Elevated Levels of Lead and Arsenic

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Please Distribute to: Obstetrics & Gynecology, Primary Care, Family Medicine, Pediatrics, Emergency Medicine, Internal Medicine, Gastroenterology, Laboratory Medicine, Neurology, Occupational and Environmental Medicine and Complementary or Alternative Medicine. Please also share with your non-hospital based colleagues.

SUMMARY:

- **New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (NYC DOHMH) identified Calabash Chalk in stores. Laboratory test results identified elevated levels of lead and arsenic in these products.**
- **Ask patients who may use West African remedies about their use of Calabash Chalk.**
- **Counsel all women, especially pregnant women, on the dangers of Calabash Chalk, and advise them not to use the product.**
- **Obtain a blood lead level if your patient ingested any of this product. Testing for arsenic is not recommended at this time unless the patient reports symptoms consistent with acute arsenic toxicity.**

Calabash Chalk (also called Calabash Clay, Nzu, Poto, Calabar Stone, Ndom, Mabele, Argile or La Craie) is a West African remedy used to relieve the symptoms of morning sickness during pregnancy. It may be packaged in a clear plastic bag with or without labeling.

Following reports from the Federal Food and Drug Administration (FDA), NYC DOHMH identified the product in several NYC stores. Laboratory tests reported elevated levels of lead and arsenic in these products. A general fact sheet on calabash chalk is available at:

<http://www.nyc.gov/html/doh/downloads/pdf/lead/lead-calabash-chalk-faq.pdf>.

NYC DOHMH also has a listing of Contaminated Herbal Medicine Products (HMPs) and Remedies which includes a listing of certain medicine products and remedies from other countries that may contain heavy metals such as lead, mercury or arsenic:

<http://www.nyc.gov/html/doh/html/lead/lead-herbalmed.shtml>

***Health Alert**- conveys the highest level of importance; warrants immediate action or attention; **Health Advisory**- provides important information for a specific incident or situation; may not require immediate action; **Health Update**- provides updated information regarding an incident or situation; unlikely to require immediate action.

Dutchess County Department of Health

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