

Understanding Heavy Metals: Key Findings from Interviews of Parents with 4-12-Month-Old Infants

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Background

- Complementary feeding guidance is essential to meet the nutrition needs of infants and young children while minimizing exposure to heavy metals found in the environment.
- The FDA Closer to Zero Action Plan and other stakeholders work collaboratively to advance this important effort to continue to further reduce the levels of heavy metals in foods eaten by infants and young children.
- Education materials for parents can be beneficial to help parents understand what heavy metals are, how heavy metals get into foods, and how to reduce exposure to heavy metals from foods.

Objectives

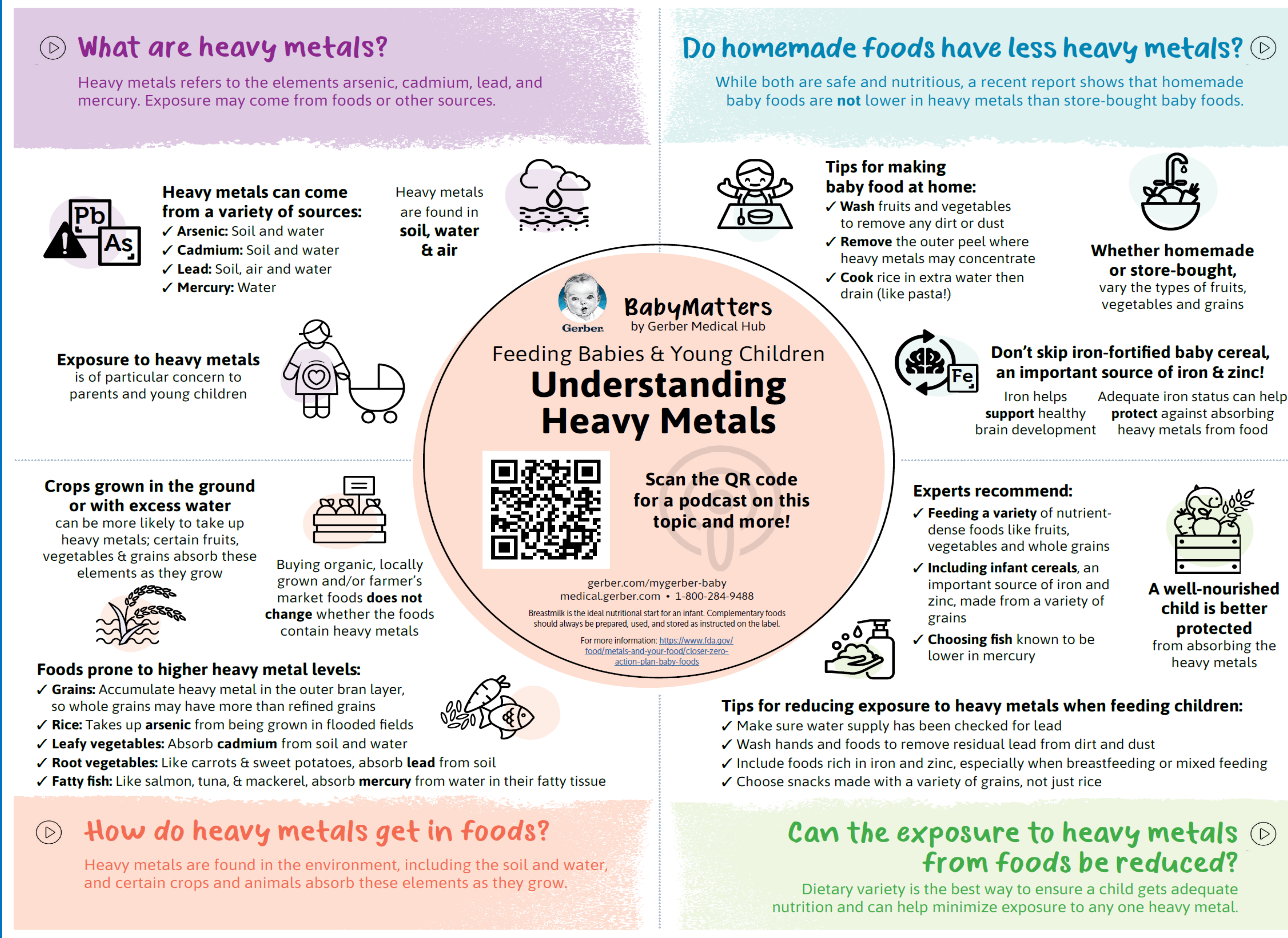
- Conduct parent interviews to ensure an infographic on heavy metals is understandable and educational.

Methods

- Data were collected in December 2022.
- A sample of 100 parents with infants 4-12 months.
- The interviews were conducted online, and the data were weighted to approximate a target sample of adults based on gender, educational attainment, age, race, and region.
- Results from the full survey have a margin of error ± 10 percentage points.

Results

- Approximately 67% of respondents had awareness about heavy metals and foods.
- Prior to education, making homemade food was seen as the best way to reduce exposure to heavy metals.
- More than 70% of parents saw the images and messages as positive.
- Top learnings from the infographic (>20-point change pre/post education):
 - Importance of thoroughly washing food to reduce heavy metal exposure.
 - Eating lots of different foods to reduce exposure.
 - Removing skin from produce to reduce exposure.
 - Making homemade baby food does not reduce exposure.



Key Findings

- 75% of respondents select 'How heavy metals get in food' and/or 'how to reduce the risk of heavy metals' as the most compelling component of the infographic
- 86% of parents are interested in learning more about this topic.
- Bullet points and clear action items (e.g., tips and expert recommendations) scored the highest in net-understanding.
- Respondents agreed they had learned a lot of information from the infographic.
- A visual infographic designed to educate parents about understanding heavy metals in foods can help increase parents' confidence and knowledge regarding dietary variety as a key strategy to help minimize heavy metal exposure in children's diets.

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