

Study cites possible harm from some East Indian alternative remedies

2005 JAN 5 - (LawRx.com) -- Dangerous levels of lead, mercury and arsenic have been found in some herbal remedies from India that are sold in the United States, researchers are warning.

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Levels high enough to cause poisoning were detected in 14 of 70 ayurvedic medicine (**The ancient Hindu science of health and medicine**) products made in south Asia and bought in Boston-area stores, according to a study by Robert Saper, MD, and colleagues at Harvard Medical School. Saper is now at Boston University.

The study appears in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*.

Some ayurvedic products use heavy metals combined with herbs, and are sold at some U.S. health food stores and Indian grocery stores as remedies for ailments such as arthritis and diabetes.

The researchers did not examine whether people who used the products studied had become ill, but the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) said in July that from 2000 to 2003, it received reports of 12 adults in five states who developed lead poisoning after using ayurvedic products.

About 80% of the population in India use ayurvedic products, and a U.S. health survey in 2000 estimated that 750,000 American adults also had used them, the study said. "The number of individuals at potential risk is substantial," the study authors said. The authors recommended mandatory U.S. testing of all imported dietary supplements for toxic metals.

Current or previous users should see their doctors about heavy metal screening, and doctors treating patients for unexplained poisoning should consider ayurvedic products a possible source, the researchers said. Lead poisoning can cause abdominal pain, fatigue, headaches and irritability.

Scott Gerson, MD, a New York physician trained in U.S. and ayurvedic medicine, said that properly processed ayurvedic products are harmless and extremely effective. Gerson, founder of the National Institute of Ayurvedic Medicine, said the study "points to the need for better quality control, which is currently under way in India."

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