



Rice Risk for Babies: New Report Finds Arsenic in 100% of Rice Samples Purchased Nationwide

More than 1 in 4 samples exceed the FDA's safety limit for infant rice cereal. No safety limit exists for rice.

Study finds 3 safer rice types, 9 safer grains, and 3 steps for parents that reduce exposures by up to 69%.

MAY 15, 2025—In a new investigation released today, [Healthy Babies Bright Futures](#) (HBBF) reported that [100% of 145 rice samples tested contained arsenic](#), a contaminant associated with health risks that include cancer and harm to the developing brain, including IQ loss. The report, the first in-depth look at arsenic in a range of popular U.S. rice types in 10 years, shows that arsenic levels have not declined, even though the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has known of the problem for 25 years.

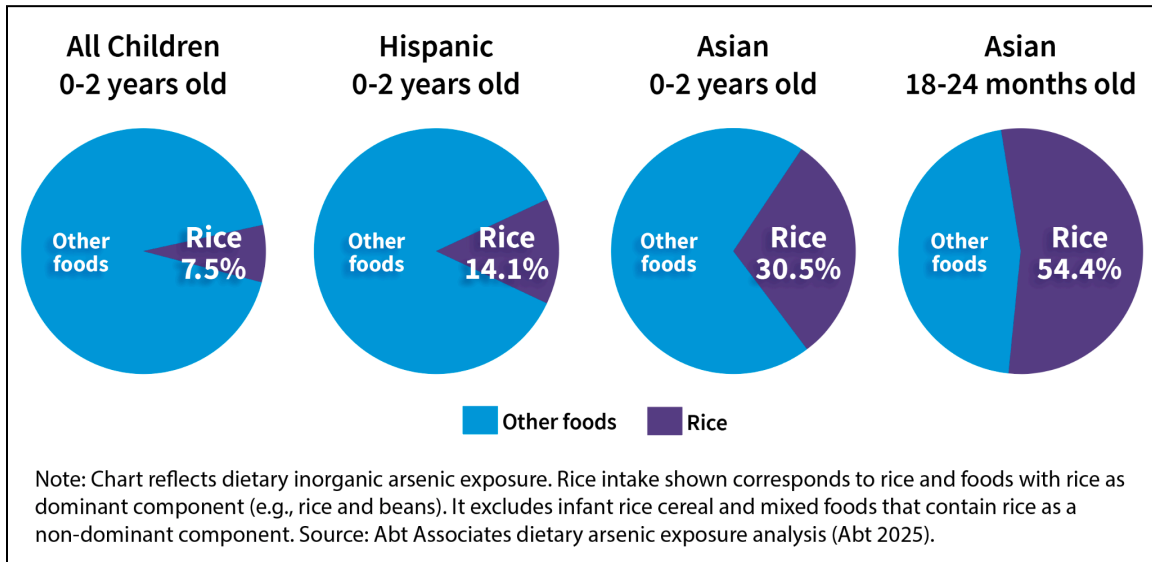
Rice is a versatile, culturally essential staple. While it contains a mix of heavy metals like most other foods, what sets rice apart is its relatively high arsenic levels and frequent consumption. Rice accumulates more arsenic from the soil than any other staple crop. For children up to age 2, rice is the **leading source of arsenic exposure from solid foods**.

Over 1 in 4 rice samples (both brown and white) exceeded the FDA's action level for arsenic in infant rice cereal — a level above which products can be considered contaminated. For parents making baby food or feeding solids at home, this means that homemade rice cereal could contain arsenic levels that would be considered unsafe if sold in stores.

[HBBF's testing](#) found four toxic heavy metals in rice: arsenic, cadmium, lead, and mercury. The highest levels were detected in brown and white rice grown in the Southeast U.S. or labeled simply as "USA" and in arborio rice from Italy. In contrast, three rice types stood out as safer choices for families, with average heavy metal levels 32% lower than other samples: California-grown rice, Thai jasmine, and Indian basmati. A saffron-seasoned rice contained lead levels up to 32 times higher than the average for other samples, raising concern about potential contamination from the added spice.

Arsenic in rice disproportionately affects Hispanic and Asian children. Federal dietary surveys show that rice contributes a significantly larger share of daily arsenic exposure for these children, up to seven times more than for other children. To better understand and reflect these communities' experiences, **HBBF partnered with GreenLatinos, Gum Moon**, and 14 other nonprofit organizations nationwide. Some of these partners helped collect rice samples from small, local markets where families shop,

and conducted a limited community survey on the cultural importance of rice. Among families surveyed, one in three said rice is either a frequent main dish or the single most important food in their diet.



“Millions of families rely on rice as an everyday food,” said Gloria Tan, Executive Director of Gum Moon in San Francisco. “Not only do babies in the Asian community eat rice every day, but so do pregnant mothers. Rice that exceeds the FDA’s action level for infant rice cereal should not be allowed on store shelves. Rice is affordable and commonly consumed by babies and during pregnancy, so this protection is essential.”

HBBF tested 66 samples of nine alternative grains, including quinoa, farro, and barley, which contained 69% less heavy metal contamination than rice, on average, making them safer substitutes. However, the cost of safer alternatives can be a barrier for families: the alternative grains cost five times more than rice on average, and affordability of safer rice varieties is about to worsen: tariffs will significantly raise prices, with a 10% tariff now in effect and higher tariffs (36% for Thai jasmine rice and 26% for Indian basmati) set to begin in July.

Partner shoppers also found that rice labeled as California-grown, a lower-arsenic option, tended to cost more in their stores than rice from other regions. For families on tight budgets – or those whose only nearby grocery options are small stores with limited rice varieties – higher-arsenic rice may be the only affordable choice. That leaves low-income families most at risk for high arsenic levels in the food that they eat.

"Rice is more than a staple in the Latino/a/e diet—it's a cultural cornerstone that has nourished our gente for generations," said Juan Madrid, a policy advocate from



GreenLatinos. “Access to clean, affordable, and sustainably grown rice is essential to Latino public health. The FDA must recognize that food security, cultural preservation, and environmental stewardship must go hand in hand, especially in comunidades historically burdened by pollution and inequality.”

“Parents shouldn’t have to worry that a common food like rice carries hidden risks,” said Jane Houlihan, study author and HBBF’s Research Director. “Our findings confirm that arsenic and cadmium in rice remain a concern, especially for young children, who are most vulnerable to harm. The FDA has the power to drive industry-wide change, and that action is long overdue. But there’s good news, too: with simple steps at home, [parents can cut their family’s exposure](#) by more than half, starting today.”

To learn more, visit <http://www.healthybabyfood.org/>



HEALTHY BABIES BRIGHT FUTURES

Healthy Babies Bright Futures (HBBF) is a non-profit organization working to create and support initiatives that reduce exposures to neurotoxic chemicals in the first thousand days of development. Our efforts are inspired and supported by science and data, and are designed to help restore the chance for a full life to children who would otherwise face brain-diminishing exposures to toxic chemicals beginning in utero.

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