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To: Authorized Representatives and Food Service Directors of School Food Authorities (SFAs) Participating in the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Child Nutrition Programs

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Subject: Nutrition and Lead Absorption

Elevated lead levels in the water in homes, schools, and child care centers is a growing concern in our state and in our communities. It is important to know that a healthy diet can help, and schools are in a unique position to provide guidance on the benefits of healthy eating. There are three key nutrients that can help block the absorption of lead in the body: calcium, iron, and vitamin C.

Calcium keeps bones strong and keeps the lead out. Serve calcium-rich foods including:

- Dairy products, such as milk, yogurt, cheese, and cottage cheese
- Green leafy vegetables, including kale and turnip and collard greens
- Broccoli
- Calcium-enriched foods, such as orange juice, soy milk, and tofu
- Canned salmon and sardines
- Almonds and almond butter

Iron blocks lead from being absorbed. Try these iron-rich foods:

- Lean red meats and chicken
- Green, leafy vegetables such as spinach and chard
- Iron-fortified cereal, bread, and pasta
- Dried fruit, such as raisins and prunes
- Beans and lentils
- Eggs

Vitamin C helps the body absorb iron and may help get rid of lead. Foods rich in vitamin C include:

- Citrus fruits and juices, such as oranges and grapefruit
- Other fruits such as kiwi, strawberries, and melon
- Tomatoes, green and red bell peppers, baked potatoes, Brussel sprouts, and broccoli

Children with empty stomachs absorb more lead than children with full stomachs. Breakfast plays a key role in “breaking the overnight fast”. The USDA School Breakfast Program meal pattern allows for foods that are high in calcium, iron, and vitamin C. Maximizing participation in the School Breakfast Program by offering Breakfast in the Classroom gives every child the opportunity to consume these important nutrients.

Eating healthy food is associated with improved cognitive function and helps put healthier children in the classroom to maximize learning. The USDA National School Lunch Program provides key nutrients that children need, and these nutrients will help minimize the effects of lead and other chronic diseases.

Other opportunities:

- Promote participation in the USDA School Meals Programs and encourage consumption of foods that are high in the key nutrients through [Smarter Lunchroom Techniques](#) and adult modeling behavior.
- Maximize your use of USDA Foods, focusing on the three target nutrients to decrease lead absorption.
- Consider participation in the Community Eligibility Provision, if your school or district is eligible, so that all students have access to healthy, free breakfast and lunch meals.
- Consider adding a salad bar in every school building and offer foods that are high in the key nutrients. Check out possible funding options through [Let's Move Salad Bars to Schools](#).
- Apply to participate in the USDA Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program.
- Apply for a USDA National School Lunch Program equipment grant to obtain salad bars, refrigeration units, or other equipment that will assist in serving key nutrient foods.

The Department of Public Instruction SNT is available to assist with menu planning, USDA Foods purchases, grant applications, etc. in efforts to help minimize the absorption of lead in our children. Please contact us at 608-267-9228 or [online](#).