

1 November 2007

PETALING JAYA: All 24 types of children's toys in a random check, from cars to jewellery and a drinking cup, tested positive for lead.

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The samples were bought from hypermarkets and a major toy store in the Klang Valley and Seremban. Some of the items, ranging in price from RM4.99 to RM29.99, were imported, while some had no indication where they were made.

Mattel and Fisher-Price toys were not included in the sampling. The tests were done by the Malaysian Association of Standards Users (Masu), an affiliation of the Federation of Malaysian Consumer Associations, following the worldwide recall of toys by Mattel and Fisher-Price this year.

A report on the results, "Lead Detection in Toys", will be handed to the Ministry of Domestic Trade and Consumer Affairs and other government agencies. The report also contains recommendations from Masu on handling the problem.

Masu director Ratna Devi Nadarajah said the amount of lead detected, with an American-made test kit, ranged from 700 parts per million to 1,200ppm.

The Malaysian voluntary standard is based on international standards and it specifies that lead content must not exceed 90ppm, against the US Standard 600ppm, Ratna Devi said.

Lead is added to the paint to enhance the colour and make them shinier. It also helps the paint last longer.

The lead in the paint can enter the bloodstream through wounds, or children can swallow it if they chew on the toys.

It builds up in the blood leading to lead poisoning, which can affect brain development, said Ratna.

Studies have shown that young children, especially those under three, are at high risk because they tend to put their fingers in their mouths and chew toys.

Those with elevated lead levels can suffer serious health and behavioural problems, including lowered IQ scores, poor motor skills, reaction time and slowed growth.

Ratna explained that the RM500 LeadCheck does not give an exact reading of the amount of lead, just an indication.

Special swabs are applied to the cleaned surfaces of the toys and the swabs are checked for colour changes at intervals for up to three hours after the first half hour.

The outcome is then compared to a reference chart. The original yellow (zero lead) changes to pink up to red, indicating varying lead content, she said.

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