



For Immediate Release
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Illinois Poison Center Responds to Baby Food Concerns
Safety Recommendations for Parents

(Chicago) -- The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) recently confirmed that two bottles of Gerber brand Banana Yogurt Dessert purchased from an Irvine, CA market in May and June contained a small amount of the poison ricin. Safety seals on both jars had been broken, and a threatening note was found inside, verifying that the bottles had been tampered with. The product is being removed from Southern California stores, but has not been recalled nationally as the problem is considered to be post-production tampering.

Ricin is a poison that is extracted from castor beans. Potential routes of exposure include breathing it in as a powder or mist, ingestion if it is put in food or water supply, or injection into the body (e.g., via a syringe). Ricin causes poisoning by getting inside the cells of a person's body and stopping the cells from making the proteins they need. Without the proteins, cells die. Eventually this can harm the whole body. Early symptoms of ricin ingestion include vomiting and diarrhea which can lead to dehydration. All organ systems including the heart, lungs and kidneys can be harmed. Severe toxicity can result in death.

In this case and other recent scares (such as the incident involving Senator Frist's office in February 2004), the amount of ricin found was low and is unlikely to cause serious symptoms.

Recognizing the increased public concern over the safety of baby food, the Illinois Poison Center (IPC) offers the following recommendations to keep your family safe:

- Inspect the safety seal before purchasing baby food.
- Listen for the "pop" on the lid seal when you open the product.
- Empty the jar into a dish before feeding.
- Call the IPC hot line (**1-800-222-1222**) immediately if you suspect someone has come into contact with a poison.

For more information on this product tampering incident, call the Gerber Parents Resource Center at 1-800-4-GERBER or visit <http://www.gerber.com/home>. Contact the Illinois Poison Center at 1-800-222-1222 with questions or concerns regarding ricin poisoning, or any other poison-related issue.

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The Illinois Poison Center (IPC) is the only certified, regional poison center in the state, serving all of Illinois. The IPC provides free advice about poison safety and treatment to the public and health care professionals. You can call the hot line 24 hours a day at **1-800-222-1222**. You will speak privately with specially trained poison experts such as doctors, nurses or pharmacists.

Editor's Note: Illinois Poison Center experts are available for media interviews. Please contact Robin Antognoli at 312/906-6146 or rantogno@ilpoison.org to schedule an interview.