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Baby formula contamination issues

On September 11, 2008, Chinese parents were hit out of the blue with an announcement saying their baby formula was potentially contaminated, and their children might be at risk of kidney failure.

In the days since, we have learned that hospitals were reporting unusual renal health problems among infants as early as March 2008, and that Sanlu, one of the leading producers of formula, had known about the problem in early August - before the Olympics started - but did not reveal it to the public nor the government until one of their foreign partners alerted the New Zealand government. We have also learned that 20% of the formula manufacturers in China have similarly contaminated product, and that even some brands of ice cream, yogurt, and liquid milk have been compromised.

It has been determined that some farms have been watering-down the milk they provide to dairies in an effort to cheat the system, and that they have added the industrial chemical melamine to skew test results to make it appear as if the diluted milk has adequate protein. Further reporting has revealed the use of this chemical in animal feed as well, throwing even more types of food into question - eggs in particular have been recalled in Fall 2008, as well as cheese and chocolate made with dairy. Melamine is the same chemical that killed hundreds of animals in the 2007 scandal around Chinese-manufactured pet food. It affects kidney function, eventually causing large stones and ultimately failure with continued exposure.

Traditionally, the advice given to parents traveling to China to unite with their adopted child was to buy extra Chinese formula, and use it when back home to transition over to Western-produced product. (That's what we did with our daughter - even using the Sanlu brand.)

However, on September 12, the US FDA issued a [health advisory](#) explicitly

[“Probe finds 20% of Chinese milk producers involved in scandal”](#): Reuters
[“China warns of ‘possibly rising’ toll...”](#): Int'l Herald Tribune

[Shanghaiist/ChinesePod](#): audio commentary

US: [FDA advisory on Chinese-manufactured formulas](#)
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stating that Chinese-manufactured infant formula should not be used. The brands the FDA lists as inspected and approved are:

Abbott Labs	PBM Nutritionals
Mead Johnson	Solus
Nestle	SHS/Nutricia

The Canadian government, and the Australia-New Zealand Food Standards authority, have also issued similar communications.

In November 2008, the American Academy of Pediatrics released its recommendation that children adopted from China as early as 2005 be tested for renal function, as it may well be the case that melamine contamination in the food supply has been more extensive and going on for much longer than officially reported.

What this also means is that traveling parents must now purchase and pack their own formula for the entire trip. It's extra bulk in your luggage - something else will need to stay home - but essential for your piece of mind, and your child's health.

*Mother with child and Sanlu powder photo from Xinhua News Agency.
 Store clearing shelf photo from the China Daily newspaper.*