

Public Health: California finds "jewellery" made of more than 95% lead on open sale

California's Attorney General Edmund Brown has issued a warning to consumers after his office learned of "jewellery" on display at two chains of stores contained close to 100% lead.

Retail chains Rainbow and 5-7-9 have been named as stockists of the potentially hazardous products. Brown's office said "Some pieces of the lead-infested jewellery were labelled "KIDS" and one piece was marked "lead free" although its clasp contained more than 80% lead.

There is no safe level of lead exposure. In 2006, a four-year-old Minnesota boy died after he swallowed a pendant from jewellery that was more than 90% lead, and it became stuck in his intestinal tract.

In a letter to the stores' corporate parent, Rainbow Apparel, Brown said, "Some of the jewellery had components that would be highly toxic, and potentially lethal, if ingested, and all of it contains sufficient lead to contribute to long-term health risks."

California law bans the sale of jewellery that fails to comply with strict limits on the amount of lead it contains. The law was the result of a 2006 settlement of a lawsuit brought by the Attorney General and two environmental groups, Centre of Environmental Health and As You Sow.

In that settlement, Rainbow and other retailers agreed to stop selling jewellery containing more than traces of lead. But four times in a little more than a year, the Attorney General has sent notices of violation to Rainbow for breaking the law and the terms of the settlement by selling jewellery made of lead.

Using a fund created in the 2006 settlement, the Centre for Environmental Health monitors the stores. In May, it purchased 16 items containing lead from Rainbow stores in Northern California. Fifteen of the pieces contained more than 50% lead. One was 97% lead, and one labelled "KIDS" and "lead free" had a clasp that contained 81% lead. It's all inexpensive costume jewellery made in China.