Feds Pull More Kids Jewelry Due To Cadmium

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LOS ANGELES (AP) -- Federal regulators said Wednesday they have found high levels of the toxic metal cadmium in trinkets that were distributed for free to children at some doctor and dentist offices over the past five years.

The news came as the Consumer Product Safety Commission announced a recall of nearly 70,000 charm bracelets and rings -- the fourth time this year that the federal government has said cheap Chinese-made jewelry was being pulled from shelves because of cadmium, a known carcinogen.

What stood out about this recall was that kids got the items in places where they are taken to stay healthy or get better.

Cadmium is a naturally occurring metal that, if ingested, can weaken bones and kidneys. The concern from federal regulators is that kids could be exposed if they bite and suck on -- and in rare cases, even swallow -- jewelry containing cadmium.

The commission said parents should immediately throw away the approximately 66,200 "Children's Happy Charm Bracelets" bracelets and 2,200 rings that have a metal football-shaped charm attached to an adjustable band. The charm bracelets have colored beads and a single metal charm shaped like a butterfly, moon or sun.

The agency has not received any reports of incidents or injuries involving either product. The items were distributed at doctor and dentist offices nationwide between June 2005 and March 2010, the agency said.

The system of rewarding kids with a toy or trinket has been commonplace for years among children's dentists.

Mary J. Hayes, a pediatric dentist in Chicago and a spokeswoman for the American Dental Association, suggested that parents who are worried about the safety of items their kids might get from a visit should speak with office staff.

"Any kind of worry like this, parents need to discuss that with the office and decide how they pick out their toys and what kinds of things they look for," Hayes said, adding that she didn't think the recalled items had been in the goodie drawer at her office.

The purchasing manager at the firm that imported the charms -- Toy Network LLC of Indianola, Iowa -- said that testing the company did earlier this year showed cadmium.

Toy Network stopped importing the items "because of testing," purchasing manager Jessica Dickinson said in a brief interview Wednesday. She would not elaborate.

While there are no federal requirements for testing cadmium in children's jewelry, some firms have started voluntarily looking for it in response to an ongoing investigation by The Associated Press that reported some Chinese manufacturers substituted cadmium when a 2008 federal law effectively banned lead from children's jewelry. Testing published by AP in January showed some jewelry was as much as 91 percent cadmium by weight, and that high levels can leach out when items were run through a test that mimics what would happen if a kid swallowed one.

In response, federal regulators have recalled Disney-branded jewelry sold at Walmart; "Best Friends" charm bracelets sold at the international jewelry and accessories chain Claire's; and in early June, 12 million "Shrek" movie-themed drinking glasses being given away by McDonald's that had cadmium pigment in their decoration.

A spokeswoman for the ring importer identified by the CPSC in Wednesday's recall -- Fun Express Oriental Trading Company, of Omaha, Neb. -- did not return calls or and e-mail seeking comment. The Carlyle Group, a private investment firm that owns Oriental Trading Company, referred a request for comment to the company.

The CPSC said it was orchestrating the recall with the distributor of the items, which it identified as SmileMakers Inc., of Spartanburg, S.C. Calls and e-mails to SmileMakers requesting comment were not returned. According to the company's website, SmileMakers is a wholly owned subsidiary of Staples, Inc.

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