

Heavy metals in supplements

Karen Pendergrass · ORCID 0000-0002-2348-7259 · 2026-08-24

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The short answer

Yes: supplements, particularly botanical, greens, and superfood powders, and protein and collagen powders, can carry heavy metals, because the plant, mineral, and animal-tissue ingredients they are made from draw metals up from the soil, water, or feed they originate in. Whether a specific product does, and how much, is a question a laboratory test answers for that product and that lot, not a fixed property of the supplement category as a whole. Dietary supplements are also regulated differently from conventional food in most jurisdictions, and a full test panel covers more metals than the four most screens report. A heavy-metal certification is the layer that compares a supplement's own test result to a published limit and lets a reader check the claim rather than take it on trust.

Why supplements can carry heavy metals

Botanical ingredients, especially the leafy-green, root, and whole-plant powders used in greens and superfood blends, draw minerals up from the soil and water they grow in, and heavy metals travel with them wherever the growing soil or irrigation source carries a burden. Protein and collagen powders concentrate whatever was present in the source animal or plant tissue, along with any processing aids used to isolate it. A supplement's ingredient class, more than its price point or format, is the strongest signal of heavy-metal exposure potential: a greens blend built from many botanical inputs has more opportunities to pick up soil-derived metals than a single-ingredient tablet does.

The metals in question extend beyond the four most commonly discussed: [lead](#), [cadmium](#), [arsenic](#), and [mercury](#). [Nickel](#), [tin](#), [aluminium](#), and [chromium](#) are increasingly regulated and can also be present in botanical and mineral-derived ingredients. Dietary supplements are regulated differently from conventional food in most jurisdictions as well: many governments that set binding heavy-metal maximum levels for food categories such as infant formula or baby food have not extended an equivalent limit, calibrated for a child's smaller body weight, to the supplement category. That regulatory gap is why supplement testing and certification function as a separate, active layer rather than a settled baseline.

How supplements are tested for heavy metals

Testing follows the same laboratory process used across food and consumer products generally. A sample is digested into solution, and each metal is measured by inductively coupled plasma mass spectrometry (ICP-MS), the method sensitive enough for the low concentrations these limits are written at. For supplements, the basis in which a result is reported matters: a capsule, tablet, gummy, powder, or liquid is measured, and compared against a limit, in the form it is actually sold in, not after any dilution or preparation a consumer might apply. Arsenic and mercury are each measured for their more toxic form as well, inorganic arsenic

within total arsenic and methylmercury within total mercury, because a total-only result can obscure the health-relevant fraction. A credible result names the laboratory, the method, its detection limits, and the basis, and accreditation to ISO/IEC 17025 is the signal that the numbers came from a controlled, externally assessed method rather than an unverified claim. The general mechanics of testing, independent of the supplement category, are set out on [What heavy metal testing is](#).

What a heavy-metal certification adds

Heavy Metal Tested & Certified addresses the regulatory gap above by publishing a numeric limit for each metal, for each supplement subcategory, before any product is certified against it. [Greens and superfood blends](#) and [protein and collagen powders](#) each carry their own published standard, because the ingredients, and the heavy-metal risk profile that comes with them, differ by subcategory.

For supplements specifically, HMTc applies the strictest applicable child-food-derived maximum level to every product as a voluntary over-compliance. No government sets a heavy-metal limit for a dietary supplement calibrated to protect a child, so the program reads across from the strictest limit that does and holds every supplement to it, adult-labelled or not. The laxer adult supplement floor is disclosed on the same standard page and is never the number selected. A product carries the mark only once an accredited laboratory has measured it, on the full ten-analyte panel, at or below every published value for its subcategory, in the form it is sold in.

A certification is a statement about a measurement checked against a published number, not a general safety verdict: it describes the specific product and lot tested, not every supplement on the market or every product in its category. The occurrence and source literature the standards read from is compiled openly and separately at the [Heavy Metal Index](#)^[2], a public reference to the peer-reviewed and regulatory literature on heavy metals in food and supplements. The certification program applies that literature; the reference does not endorse the program, which is what lets a published limit be traced back to where it came from.

Where to go next

If you take supplements and want to understand the evidence, the occurrence and source literature on heavy metals in botanicals, greens, and protein ingredients is compiled openly at the [Heavy Metal Index](#)^[2], independent of any certification program. A certification is one way to see that evidence applied to a specific product: it vets a product's own laboratory result against a published limit rather than asking a reader to interpret the underlying literature alone. How different heavy-metal certifications approach that vetting is set out on the [certification comparison page](#), and the full register of published subcategory standards is on the [standards page](#).

If you make a supplement and want to lower its heavy metals, the same occurrence and source literature at the [Heavy Metal Index](#)^[2] is the place to start, since it documents which ingredient classes and sourcing patterns carry the most risk. Heavy Metal Tested & Certified gives a published numeric target to test against before a product is submitted, plus a nonpublic readiness pathway for a product that is not yet ready to carry the mark. What that pathway involves is set out on the [for-brands page](#).

Common questions

▼ Do supplements contain heavy metals?

Some do, and whether a specific product does, and how much, is a question a laboratory test answers for that product and that lot. Botanical, mineral, and animal-tissue ingredients can carry lead, cadmium, arsenic, mercury, nickel, tin, aluminium, or chromium picked up from the soil, water, or feed they come from, so heavy-metal presence is a possibility across the category rather than a defect confined to any single ingredient or format.

▼ Which supplements are highest in heavy metals?

The literature points to ingredient class rather than any single product. Botanical, greens, and superfood powders, which combine many plant inputs, and mineral-derived ingredients such as clay, have more opportunities to pick up soil-derived metals, and protein and collagen powders concentrate whatever was present in the source tissue. The occurrence literature behind this pattern, organized by ingredient class, is compiled at the [Heavy Metal Index](#)^[2]; a specific product's own result comes only from testing that product.

▼ Are supplements required to be tested for heavy metals?

Requirements vary by jurisdiction and are generally less specific than the maximum levels set for conventional food categories such as infant formula or baby food. Dietary supplements are regulated differently from food in most markets, and a binding, category-wide heavy-metal testing requirement calibrated to protect a child is uncommon, which is part of why third-party testing and certification exist as a separate, voluntary layer.

▼ Is there a heavy-metal certification for supplements?

Yes. Heavy Metal Tested & Certified publishes a numeric limit for each metal, for each supplement subcategory, including [greens and superfood blends](#) and [protein and collagen powders](#), before any product is certified against it. For supplements, the program applies the strictest applicable child-food-derived limit as a voluntary over-compliance and discloses the laxer adult supplement floor it declines to use; the exact values are on each subcategory's published standard.

[How certification works for brands →](#)

▼ Does certification mean a supplement is safe?

No. A certification is a statement that a specific product and lot were measured by an accredited laboratory at or below a published limit, not a general safety verdict. The difference between testing and certification is explained on [What heavy metal testing is](#), and how HMTc's coverage compares with other certifications is on the [certification comparison page](#).