



WORLD ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH DAY 2026

Standing with Science to Protect Communities

! WHAT IS THE PROBLEM?

In recent years there has been a **significant increase** in the use of aluminium waste to make cooking pots in the informal sector.



A wide range of waste aluminium items, including **engine parts, vehicle radiators, lead batteries, computer parts, construction material and electrical appliances**, may be melted to craft cooking pots.

The metals are melted at relatively low temperatures in rudimentary devices, such as metal drums, often in backyard cottage industries.

Research undertaken at the **South African Medical Research Council (SAMRC)** has shown that toxic metals such as lead and arsenic may leach from some of the pots into foods, in some instances at very high concentrations.



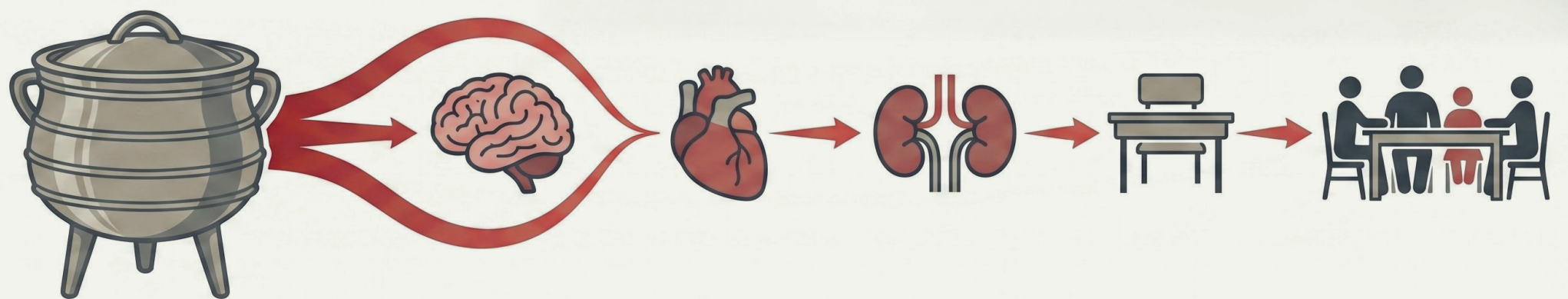
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KEY MESSAGES:

Elevated concentrations of toxic metals are associated with a range of health risks, including:



- Feeling tired or weak
- Muscle or joint pain
- Headaches or stomach cramps
- Elevated levels of aggression or violence
- Loss of appetite
- Learning difficulties, poor school performance, reduction in IQ scores

METALS MAY ALSO INTERFERE WITH NORMAL DEVELOPMENT OF:

brain • kidneys • heart • nerves • blood cells • other organs

AT VERY HIGH LEVELS OF EXPOSURE

Lead is associated with permanent muscular paralysis, coma and death. Since these pots may be widely used in homes, schools, street food markets and during celebrations, there is growing concern for the health of all users — especially young children who are particularly vulnerable and may bear the consequences for many years.



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WHAT YOU CAN DO TO PROTECT YOURSELF:

DO



Use anodized aluminium cookware — it has a hard, non-stick surface, is scratch resistant, durable and easy to clean, and less likely to leach metals into foods.



Cast iron pots are associated with lower rates of leaching metals into foods.



Check pots often for cracks or chips. Damaged items can absorb germs or harmful substances — mend or replace them.

DON'T



Do not cook or store foods in aluminium pots for long periods.



Do not cook or store highly acidic foods (such as those containing tomatoes, pineapples or lemon juice) in aluminium pots.



When washing your pots avoid rough cleaners or scrubbers that could harm the surface or remove its protective layer.