
Lead Poisoning in Children

What You Need to Know



What is lead poisoning?

Lead poisoning is when a person's health is affected by lead contamination in what they eat, drink, touch, or breathe. Children under 6 years of age are most at risk for lead poisoning due to their small size and developing brains. No safe level of lead exposure in children has been identified. Childhood lead exposure can cause long-term harm but is preventable.

What are the health effects of childhood lead poisoning?

Lead poisoning affects the brain and nervous system. Health effects can be hard to recognize, and include:

- Headaches
- Vomiting
- Constipation
- Appetite loss/weight loss
- Slowed growth and development
- Learning, attention, and behavior problems
- Hearing and speech problems
- Lower IQ
- Kidney problems

When is a child at risk for lead poisoning?

When a child:

- Lives in or regularly spends time in a home or building built before 1950.
- Has recently lived in or regularly spends time in a home or building built before 1950.
- Lives in or regularly visits a home built before 1978 that was recently remodeled.
- Has a sibling or playmate diagnosed with lead poisoning.
- Lives with an adult whose job or hobby involves lead (auto repair, making stained glass, using firing ranges and/or fishing sinkers, etc).
- Eats foods prepared with spices or food additives that were obtained from outside the United States.
- Uses products such as folk, herbal, or Ayurvedic remedies or cosmetics, imported toys or candy, handmade or imported glazed pottery, or leaded glassware.
- Puts nonfood items in their mouth or eats things that are not food (pica).

Children often get lead poisoned when they breathe or swallow lead dust that gets on their hands and toys or eat chips of deteriorating lead-based paint.

Where can lead be found in my home?

- Lead-based paint - often found in homes and furniture painted prior to 1978.
- Soil, especially around peeling exterior paint, high traffic areas, factories with smokestacks and incinerators, and areas where there is sandblasting.
- Drinking water exposed to lead from the environment or from lead pipes, lead solder in pipes, and/or faucets containing lead.
- Children's toys (lead paint was banned in the U.S. in 1978 but may still be found on older or imported toys).
- Leaded crystal, lead-based glaze, and paint used on pottery.

- Imported foods in lead soldered cans.
- Some imported folk medicines, spices, food additives, or cosmetics.
- Clothing worn during activities that create lead dust/particles, including working in smelting and battery plants, doing automotive repairs, making stained glass, casting bullets, using firing ranges, furniture refinishing, or making fishing sinkers.
- Dust from some imported vinyl mini blinds and painted friction surfaces (such as opening and closing windows and doors) painted prior to 1978.

How can I tell if my child has lead poisoning?

A blood lead test is the only way to know if your child has lead poisoning. Children should be tested at one AND two years of age, or if you think that they were exposed to a lead hazard. Most children who have lead poisoning do not look or act sick. Talk to your child's doctor for more information about blood lead testing.

How do I protect my child from lead poisoning?

- Keep children away from peeling paint and prevent them from sucking or chewing painted objects such as windowsills and painted toys.
- Regularly wash children's hands, bottles, pacifiers, and toys. They can become contaminated from household dust or exterior soil.
- Feed your child healthy foods high in calcium, iron, and Vitamin C. These foods may help keep lead from being absorbed in the body.
- Regularly wet-mop floors and wet-wipe window areas (sills, frames, wells, etc.). Do not use a broom to sweep areas with potential lead dust.
- Use a vacuum with a HEPA filter. A regular vacuum can spread lead dust into the air. Some health departments have HEPA vacuums available to borrow.
- Keep your home well-maintained to prevent and fix peeling paint. Do not sand, as this creates dust particles that contain lead.
- Take off shoes when entering the house to prevent bringing in lead-contaminated soil.
- Prevent children from playing in bare soil. Plant grass on areas of bare soil or cover the soil with grass seed, mulch, or wood chips.
- Children and pregnant women should not be present in housing built before 1978 that is undergoing renovations. They should not participate in activities that disturb old paint or in cleaning up paint debris after work is completed.
- If you have older plumbing containing lead pipes or fittings, flush your cold-water pipes by running the water for approximately five minutes. The longer water sits in pipes, the more lead it may contain. After the flushing process, you can fill containers for later use. Use water only from the cold-water tap for drinking, cooking, and making baby formula, as hot water is likely to contain higher levels of lead. If you do not know if your home has older plumbing, contact your local water authority.
- You may choose to install a water filter that is certified to NSF/ANSI Standard 53 for lead removal. If a water filter is installed, replace filters as recommended by the manufacturer.



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