

Lead Poisoning

Lead is a highly **toxic metal** that can be found in many products in our home and work environments. Before 1978, lead was present in materials used for building homes such as paint and pipelines, and until the late 1980s lead was found in gasoline. Because it was so commonly used, much of the water, soil, and air in our environment also contained lead particles. Since then, numerous studies have proven that lead exposure causes a range of **serious health effects**, especially for children. Although efforts have been made to clean our environments of this hazardous pollutant, such as taking lead out of gasoline, lead poisoning remains a problem.

Children are more vulnerable to the harmful effects of lead because of their developing brains and nervous systems. Children, especially under the age of six, also absorb greater amounts of lead than adults do even when their exposure to lead is identical. In addition, children's behavior, including increased hand to mouth activity, a tendency to crawl and play in spaces that could be contaminated by lead, and a lack of awareness about proper safety and sanitary habits, all put children at a higher risk for lead poisoning. The damage from lead poisoning is life long. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Center for Disease Control (CDC) are government agencies that have established guidelines for childhood lead testing and both strongly urge that children under the age of six be tested for lead once a year.

Common Sources of Lead

Today, the most common source of lead exposure is **lead paint** in houses, including paint **chips** and **dust** from painted doors and windows. **Soil** may also be contaminated with lead particles. Lead can come from lead smelters or other **industries** that release it into the air. It may also be found in drinking **water** if plumbing contains lead or lead solder. In addition, old painted toys, furniture, and pottery with lead based glazes can be sources of lead.

Serious health effects that children with high levels of lead in their bodies may face include damage to the brain and nervous system, behavior and learning problems such as hyperactivity, ADD, ADHD, slowed growth, hearing problems, headaches, and memory and concentration problems. Conditions that start in childhood can persist and progress into other health problems as an adult.

What You Can Do to Protect Against Lead Poisoning

- **Test yourself!** EPA and CDC recommend that children under the age of six be tested for lead once a year. Consult your doctor or pediatrician about having your child tested.
- **Test your home!** Call your local health department or water supplier to find out about testing for lead in your home and water. Fix any peeling paint in your home if it was built before 1978. Professional services, guides, and home testing kits are both available from EPA and HUD. It is important to take all the appropriate precautions when testing for lead or doing renovations in a home with lead, as these activities could be hazardous if performed inappropriately.
- **Keep your home clean**, free of dust and chipping paint and get rid of old painted toys and furniture. Thoroughly **wash** clothes and hands if there is any possibility of lead contamination. Make sure foods and liquids are not stored in lead crystal or lead glazed pottery.
- **Keep a healthy diet.** Foods rich in calcium, iron, and vitamin C, (such as leafy greens, citrus fruits, and dairy) can reduce lead absorption. Nutrient rich diets also strengthen immune systems.
- If you think your **water** has lead in it, use only cold water for drinking and cooking and run water for 15 to 30 seconds before drinking it. You cannot see, smell, or taste lead. Boiling your water will not get rid of it.
- **Educate yourself!** Learn more about the dangers of lead poisoning, the lead testing guidelines, and national and state legislation regarding lead exposure by visiting informational websites. Our country could completely eliminate lead poisoning within a few years if we invest the right resources.

Lead Informational Resources

www.epa.gov/lead, website for the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency with extensive lead information and the number for the National Lead Information Center: **1-800-424-LEAD**

www.cdc.gov/nceh/lead website for the Center for Disease Control's Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Program with extensive lead poisoning information and resources

www.niehs.nih.gov/external/faq/alpha-l.htm, website for the National Institute of Environmental Health Services with a wide variety of lead poisoning information, and www.niehs.nih.gov/oc/factsheets/lyh/lyh.htm, an informative webpage put together by the NIEHS called "Lead is All Around Us"

www.leadSAFE.org, website for the Coalition to End Childhood Lead Poisoning, with a wealth of information about lead, links to other websites, and a hotline number: **1-800-370-LEAD**

www.aecplp.org, website for the Alliance to End Childhood Lead Poisoning, a national public interest group with a wealth of information about childhood lead poisoning.

www.keepkidshealthy.com/welcome/lead.html, a children's health website with a guide to lead poisoning info

www.clearcorps.org, website for ClearCorps, an AmeriCorps organized partnership that brings communities together to protect children from lead poisoning

www.aclppp.org/regs.shtml, website for the Alameda County, Community Development Agency that outlines laws and regulations regarding lead paint in commercial and private residences

www.wellness.ucdavis.edu/safety_info/poison_prevention/poison_book/lead_poisoning.html, a webpage with a question/answer page about lead poisoning from the UC Davis Health System

www.aacap.org/publications/factsfam/lead.htm, an article by the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry about how lead exposure in children affects brain and behavior

www.cehn.org, website for the Children's Environmental Health Network, a multidisciplinary non-profit organization that works to protect children from environmental hazards and to promote a healthy environment for the fetus and child through science, policy, and education outreach. This site also provides a **resource guide** to many other children's health resources



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