Don’t Spread Lead

A Do-It-Yourself Guide to Lead-Safe Painting, Repair, and Home Improvement

Are you working on an older house?
If you are working on a house built before 1978, read this booklet before you start. It will help you to protect your family from lead poisoning.

“Working lead-safe isn’t hard. It’s worth the effort to protect our family from lead poisoning.”

This booklet was developed by the New England Lead Coordinating Committee (www.nelcc.uconn.edu), 2006, and is reprinted with its permission (approval number 1-11-2008).

You've decided to do some work on your older home.

Maybe you are painting a room for a new baby.

Or maybe you are repairing a door that sticks.

These and similar small projects can be great do-it-yourself jobs. But if you are working in a home that was built **before 1978**, you have to work **lead-safe**.

- **This booklet explains how to handle small repairs or renovations safely.**
- **If you are doing major repairs or renovations that may create a lot of dust – jobs like replacing windows – consider taking a training course in lead-safe work practices. Or consider hiring a qualified contractor who has been trained in lead-safe practices.**
- **Ask the agencies listed in the back of this booklet for information about these courses.**

Why should you work lead-safe?

If the house you are fixing up was built before 1978, it may contain lead paint. Common fix-up jobs (such as painting a room or repairing a door that sticks) can create dust or paint chips that contain lead. Lead is a **poison** that is dangerous to you and your family.

When people swallow or breathe in lead dust, they can become lead poisoned. It takes only a very small amount of lead to poison someone.

Lead is especially dangerous for **children**. It can cause serious learning and behavior problems. It is very dangerous for **pregnant women** and their unborn babies. Lead can also make adults sick.

This booklet tells you how you can protect yourself and your family from lead poisoning and work lead-safe while you fix up your house.

"My parents are working lead-safe to protect our family."

How can you work lead-safe?

There are five important steps to working lead-safe:

1. Protect your family and your neighbors.
2. Prepare your work area.
3. Protect yourself from lead dust.
4. Work wet.
5. Work clean.

Following these five steps will help keep you and your family safe from lead poisoning.

Step 1. Protect your family and neighbors.

Keep your family and your neighbors away from paint dust and chips.

- Keep everyone, except for people doing the work, out of the room. Do not let anyone else in the room until the job is finished and the area is completely clean.
- Keep pets out of the room too. Pets can track lead dust or chips into other areas.
- Close all doors and windows to keep dust and paint chips away from your family and your neighbors.

"My baby and I are staying away from the room that my husband is fixing up."

Step 2. Prepare your work area.

If you are working inside the house, it's best to work on only one room at a time.

First, set up the room.

- Move furniture, rugs, curtains, clothing, toys, food, and all other movable items out of the room.
- Items that you cannot move, such as counter tops or heavy furniture, should be covered with 6-mil plastic sheeting. Use duct tape around all the edges of the sheeting to keep it securely in place.
- Close all doors, windows, and other openings in the room and cover them with 6-mil plastic sheeting. Use duct tape around all the edges of the sheeting to keep it securely in place.
- Turn off forced-air heating and air conditioning systems. Cover the air vents with 6-mil plastic sheeting and tape the sheeting securely in place with duct tape.
- Cover the floor with 6-mil plastic sheeting. Use duct tape around all the edges of the sheeting to keep it securely in place.
- Place a sticky (or tacky) pad just outside the room to trap small bits of dust and paint chips as you leave the room.

Next, put all of your supplies in the room. If you have to leave the room for supplies, you may spread lead dust outside the work area.

Supplies for working lead-safe.

Use this checklist to make sure that you have all the supplies you need to work lead-safe. You can buy these supplies at most paint, hardware, or home improvement stores.

As you put each item in the room, you can place a checkmark on the list below.

To keep lead dust from spreading, you will need:

- ☐ One or more spray bottles filled with water
- ☐ Heavy-duty (6-mil thick) plastic sheeting
- ☐ Duct tape
- ☐ Sticky or tacky pads for the floor to trap dust and paint chips

To protect yourself, you will need some safety gear:

- ☐ Safety glasses
- ☐ Disposable gloves
- ☐ Disposable hats
- ☐ Disposable shoe covers
- ☐ Disposable coveralls

To clean up, you will need:

- ☐ Two mops (with disposable mop heads) and two buckets
- ☐ An all-purpose cleaner
- ☐ Disposable rags, sponges, or paper towels
- ☐ Heavy-duty plastic bags
- ☐ A HEPA vacuum cleaner (a special vacuum cleaner that traps tiny bits of lead dust). To locate a HEPA vacuum cleaner call your state agency listed in the back of this booklet.
- ☐ Baby wipes

If you are working outside the house:

- Move outside furniture, playground equipment, toys, and other items at least 20 feet from the work area.
- Cover any items that cannot be moved with 6-mil plastic sheeting.
- Cover the ground with 6-mil plastic sheeting or weed-block cloth (if using a ladder, cut slits in the plastic or cloth to secure the feet of the ladder to the ground).
- Ask your neighbors to close their doors and windows to keep out any lead dust.
- Don’t work on windy or rainy days.

Step 3. Protect yourself from lead dust.

Before you begin work, put on your safety equipment:

- Safety glasses
- Disposable gloves
- Disposable hat
- Disposable shoe covers
- Disposable coveralls
- If your work will create a lot of dust, you may need to use a respirator. Check with your doctor before you use a respirator, if your doctor approves it, use a respirator labeled N100. Follow the manufacturer's instructions.

While you are in the work area, do not eat, drink, or smoke. Do not apply cosmetics or lip balm.

Whenever you leave the work area, wash your hands and face right away.

"I put on safety equipment to protect myself from lead dust while I'm working."

Step 4. Work wet.

Many common repair activities can create dangerous lead dust. To avoid creating lead dust, you can **work wet.**

When you are working on a painted surface

Do	Don't
Do fill a spray bottle with water. Use it to lightly mist the painted surface before you sand, scrape, pry, saw, or drill it. **Do** keep spraying lightly as you continue to work. **Do** spray everywhere **except** near electrical outlets or switches. Use a damp (not dripping) sponge or rag in these areas instead.	**Do not** dry sand, scrape, pry, saw, or drill a painted surface. These activities can create a lot of lead dust. **Do not** spray water near electricity.
After you spray the painted surface, sand or scrape it by **hand**.	**Do not** use power sanders or grinders. **Do not** sandblast.
If you use a chemical stripper, use one that is safe for people and for the environment.	**Do not** use methylene chloride. It is poisonous.
If you use a heat gun, use a **low** or **medium** setting (700 degrees Fahrenheit or lower).	**Do not** use a heat gun over 700 degrees Fahrenheit. **Do not** use an open flame or torch to burn off paint.

After you spray the painted surface, sand or scrape it by hand.

Step 5. Work clean.

While you are working:

Keep dust and paint chips inside the work area.

Keep dust inside the work area

- Wipe your feet carefully before you leave the work area. Take off your disposable shoe covers and wipe your feet on a sticky pad.
- Wash your hands and face right after you leave the work area.
- Change your work clothes and shoes right after you finish for the day.
- Shower and wash your hair as soon as possible after you finish working.
- Wash your work clothes separately from other family laundry.

Clean up as you work.

Clean often

- If you create any dust or paint chips as you work, clean up right away.
- Use a damp rag or paper towel, and scrub hard.
- Put the dirty rag or paper towel into a plastic bag.
- When you are working outside, clean up carefully at the end of each work day, even if the project is not finished.

Step 5. Work clean (continued).

When you finish your indoor fix-up project:

First, pick up and HEPA vacuum.

- Pick up any big pieces of trash and put them in a plastic bag. Seal the bag with duct tape.
- Spray your plastic sheeting and carefully fold it inward. Put the sheeting in a plastic bag, and seal the bag with duct tape.
- Vacuum the entire room with a HEPA vacuum. (DO NOT use regular vacuums or brooms because they can spread lead dust. If you do not have a HEPA vacuum, go to the next step.)

Pick up and HEPA vacuum

Step 5. Work clean (continued).

Next, wash all of the surfaces in the room (even if you did not work on those surfaces).

- Fill two buckets: one with an all-purpose cleaner mixed with water, and the other with clean rinse water.
- Use disposable rags, sponges, or paper towels.
- Wash a small area, then rinse. Continue until you have cleaned the whole room. Change the water in both buckets often.
- Start with the walls. Wash from the top down. As you work downward, wash any other hard surfaces, such as counter tops.
- When you reach the floor, use two mops: one mop for washing and the other for rinsing.
- Scrub hard – do not just wipe lightly.
- Vacuum again with a HEPA vacuum cleaner. Never clean up with a regular vacuum cleaner or broom because these tools can spread lead dust.

Wash and rinse

Step 5. Work clean (continued).

When you finish your outdoor fix-up project:

- Pick up any big pieces of trash and put them in a plastic bag. Seal the bag with duct tape.
- Spray your plastic sheeting or weed-block cloth and carefully fold it inward. Place the sheeting or cloth in a plastic bag, and seal the bag with duct tape.

Get rid of all of your trash:

Dispose of trash safely

- Put all of your dirty rags, paper towels, sponges, and mop heads into plastic bags.
- Follow your local regulations for disposal.
- Do not burn any trash that contains dust or chips.
- Dump the waste water from your cleanup activities down a toilet. Never pour waste water on the ground or into a storm drain.

How can you check your work?

When your work is finished, look carefully to see whether you have cleaned up all the dust and paint chips in the work area. If you see any dust or chips, clean the area again.

When you have finished cleaning an area, rub the surface with a baby wipe. If you see any dust on the baby wipe, clean the area again.

For a more complete check, you can take dust wipe samples and send them to a lab. The lab can tell whether you still have lead dust in your home. Contact your state agency listed on the back of this booklet to learn how to take lead dust wipe samples.

If you see any dust or chips, clean the area again.

How can you get more information?

If you have any questions about working lead-safe, you can contact the individuals or agencies listed below.

Alabama Department of Public Health/ Division of Community Environmental Protection	Phone: (334) 206-5373 Toll Free: (800) 819-7644 Fax: (334) 206-5788	http://www.adph.org/lead/
University of Alabama Safe State Environmental Programs	(800) 421-7141	http://www.alabamasafestate.ua.edu/safe_state_environmental.htm
Bureau of Family Health Programs: Alabama Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Project	334) 206-2966 Fax: (334) 206-2983	http://www.adph.org/ACLPPP/
Alabama Cooperative Extension System: Lead Education Web site		www.aces.edu/lead
Lead Resources Page (National Center for Healthy Housing)		http://www.centerforhealthyhousing.org/html/lead_resources.htm
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)		www.epa.gov/lead
U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)		www.hud.gov/offices/lead
U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)		www.cdc.gov/nceh/lead/lead.htm

NELCC
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Coordinating Committee

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