

Facts About Lead

FACT: Lead exposure can harm young children and babies even before they are born.

FACT: Even children who seem healthy can have high levels of lead in their bodies.

FACT: You can get lead in your body by breathing or swallowing lead dust, or by eating soil or paint chips containing lead.

FACT: You have many options for reducing lead hazards. In most cases, lead-based paint that is in good condition is not a hazard.

FACT: Removing lead-based paint improperly can increase the danger to your family.

If you think your home might have lead hazards, read on to learn about lead and some simple steps to protect your family.

Health Effects of Lead

- ❖ Childhood lead poisoning remains a major environmental health problem in the United States.
- ❖ People can get lead in their body if they:
 - ⇒ Put their hands or other objects covered with lead dust in their mouths.
 - ⇒ Eat paint chips or soil that contains lead.
 - ⇒ Breathe in lead dust, especially during renovations that disturb painted surfaces.
- ❖ Lead is more dangerous to children because:
 - ⇒ Babies and young children often put their hands and other objects in their mouths. These objects can have lead dust on them.
 - ⇒ Children's growing bodies absorb more lead.
 - ⇒ Children's brains and nervous systems are more sensitive to the damaging effects of lead.
- ❖ If not detected early, children with high levels of lead in their bodies can suffer from:
 - ⇒ Damage to the brain and nervous system
 - ⇒ Behavior and learning problems, such as hyperactivity
 - ⇒ Slowed growth
 - ⇒ Hearing problems
 - ⇒ Headaches
- ❖ Lead is also harmful to adults. Adults can suffer from:
 - ⇒ Reproductive problems (in both men and women)
 - ⇒ High blood pressure and hypertension
 - ⇒ Nerve disorders
 - ⇒ Memory and concentration problems
 - ⇒ Muscle and joint pain

Where Lead is Found

- ❖ In general, the older your home, the more likely it has lead-based paint. Many homes built before 1978 have lead-based paint. The federal government banned lead-based paint from housing in 1978. Some states stopped its use even earlier.

- ❖ Lead can be found:
 - ⇒ In homes in the city, country, or suburbs.
 - ⇒ In apartments, single-family homes, and both private and public housing. Inside and outside of the house.
 - ⇒ In soil around a home. Soil can pick up lead from exterior paint, or other sources such as past use of leaded gas in cars, and children playing in yards can ingest or inhale lead dust.
 - ⇒ In household dust. Dust can pick up lead from deteriorating lead-based paint or from soil tracked into a home.
 - ⇒ In drinking water. Your home might have plumbing with lead or lead solder. Call your local health department or water supplier to find out about testing your water. You cannot see, smell or taste lead, and boiling your water will not get rid of lead. If you think your plumbing might have lead in it, use only cold water for drinking and cooking. Run water for 15 to 30 seconds before drinking it, especially if you have not used your water for a few hours.
 - ⇒ At your workplace. If you work with lead, you could bring it home on your hands or clothes. Shower and change clothes before coming home if you are exposed to lead in the workplace. Launder your work clothes separately from the rest of your family's clothes.
 - ⇒ On old painted toys and furniture.
 - ⇒ In food and liquids stored in lead crystal or lead-glazed pottery or porcelain. Food can become contaminated because lead can leach in from these containers.
 - ⇒ From lead smelters or other industries that release lead into the air.
 - ⇒ In hobbies that use lead, such as making pottery or stained glass, or refinishing furniture.
 - ⇒ In folk remedies that contain lead, such as "greta" and "azarcon" used to treat an upset stomach.

Where Lead is Likely to be a Hazard

- ❖ Lead from paint chips and lead in dust can be serious hazards.
- ❖ Peeling, chipping, chalking, or cracking lead-based paint is a hazard and needs immediate attention.
- ❖ Lead-based paint may also be a hazard when found on surfaces that children can chew or that get a lot of wear-and-tear. These areas include:
 - ⇒ Windows and window sills.
 - ⇒ Doors and door frames.
 - ⇒ Stairs, railings, and banisters.
 - ⇒ Porches and fences.
- ❖ Note: Lead-based paint that is in good condition is usually not a hazard.
- ❖ Dust containing lead can occur when lead-based paint is dry scraped, dry sanded, or heated. Dust also forms when painted surfaces bump or rub together. Lead chips and dust can get on surfaces and objects that people touch. Settled dust can re-enter the air when people vacuum, sweep or walk through it.
- ❖ Lead in soil can be a hazard when children play in the soil or when people bring soil into the house on their shoes. Contact the National Lead Information Center (NLIC) to find out about testing soil for lead.

How to Check Your Family and Home for Lead

- ❖ Just knowing that a home has lead-based paint may not tell you if there is a hazard.
- ❖ To reduce your child's exposure to lead, get your child checked, have your home tested (especially if your home has paint in poor condition and was built before 1978), and fix any hazards you may have.
- ❖ Consult your doctor for advice on testing your children. A simple blood test can detect high levels of lead. Children's blood lead levels tend to increase rapidly from 6 to 12 months of age, and tend to

peak at 18 to 24 months of age. Your doctor can explain what the test results mean and if more testing will be needed.

- ❖ Blood tests are important for:
 - ⇒ Children at ages one and two.
 - ⇒ Children and other family members who have been exposed to high levels of lead.
 - ⇒ Children who should be tested under your state or local health screening plan.
- ❖ You can get your home checked for lead two different ways:
 - ⇒ A paint inspection tells you the lead content of every different type of painted surface in your home. It won't tell you whether the paint is a hazard or how you should deal with it.
 - ⇒ A risk assessment tells you if there are any sources of serious lead exposure (such as peeling paint and lead dust). It also tells you what actions to take to address these hazards.
- ❖ Have qualified professionals do the work. There are standards in place for certifying lead-based paint professionals to ensure the work is done safely, reliably, and effectively. Contact the National Lead Information Center (NLIC) for a list of contacts in your area.
- ❖ Trained professionals use a range of methods when checking your home, including:
 - ⇒ Visual inspection of paint condition and location.
 - ⇒ A portable x-ray fluorescence (XRF) machine.
 - ⇒ Lab tests of paint samples.
 - ⇒ Surface dust tests.
- ❖ Note: Home test kits for lead are available, but studies suggest that they are not always accurate. Consumers should not rely on these tests before doing renovations or to assure safety.

What You Can Do to Protect Your Family

- ❖ If you suspect that your house has lead hazards, you can take some immediate steps to reduce your family's risk:
 - ⇒ If you rent, notify your landlord of peeling or chipping paint.
 - ⇒ Clean up paint chips immediately.
 - ⇒ Clean floors, window frames, window sills, and other surfaces weekly. Use a mop, sponge, or paper towel with warm water and a general all-purpose cleaner or a cleaner made specifically for lead.
 - ⇒ Thoroughly rinse sponges and mop heads after cleaning dirty or dusty areas.
 - ⇒ Wash children's hands often, especially before they eat and before nap time and bed time.
 - ⇒ Keep play areas clean. Wash bottles, pacifiers, toys, and stuffed animals regularly.
 - ⇒ Keep children from chewing window sills or other painted surfaces.
 - ⇒ Clean or remove shoes before entering your home to avoid tracking in lead from soil.
 - ⇒ Make sure children eat healthy and nutritious meals as recommended by the National Dietary Guidelines. Children with good diets absorb less lead.
- ❖ You can temporarily reduce lead hazards by taking actions such as repairing damaged painted surfaces and planting grass to cover soil with high lead levels. These actions are not permanent solutions and will need ongoing attention.
- ❖ To permanently remove lead hazards, you must hire a certified lead abatement contractor. Abatement (or permanent hazard elimination) methods include removing, sealing, or enclosing lead-based paint with special materials. Just painting over the hazard with regular paint is not enough.
- ❖ Always hire a person with special training for correcting lead problems -- someone who knows how to do this work safely and has the proper equipment to clean up thoroughly. Certified contractors will employ qualified workers and follow strict safety rules set by their state or the federal government.
- ❖ Contact the National Lead Information Center (NLIC) for help with locating certified contractors in your area and to see if financial assistance is available.

- ❖ If you are planning to buy or rent a home built before 1978, Federal law requires that buyers and renters receive certain information before renting or buying a pre-1978 housing:
 - ⇒ LANDLORDS have to disclose known information on lead-based paint and lead-based paint hazards before leases take effect. Leases must include a disclosure form about lead-based paint.
 - ⇒ SELLERS have to disclose known information on lead-based paint and lead-based paint hazards before selling a house. Sales contracts must include a disclosure form about lead-based paint. Buyers have up to ten days to check for lead hazards.
- ❖ Beginning in April 2010, federal law requires that contractors performing renovation, repair and painting projects that disturb lead-based paint in homes, child care facilities, and schools built before 1978 must be certified and follow specific work practices to prevent lead contamination. For more information on renovations, go to: [Lead-Safe Certification Program](#)
- ❖ For more information on lead, go to: [Lead Information Center](#)