

# Lead Poisoning And Your Children



## Lead awareness and your children

There are approximately half a million U.S. children ages 1-5 with blood lead levels above 5 micrograms per deciliter ( $\mu\text{g}/\text{dL}$ ), the reference level at which CDC recommends public health actions be initiated. You may have lead around your building without knowing it because you can't see, taste, or smell lead. You may have lead in the dust, paint, or soil in and around your home, or in your drinking water or food. Because it does not break down naturally, lead can remain a problem until it is removed.

Before we knew how harmful it could be, lead was used in paint, gasoline, water pipes, and many other products. Now that we know the dangers of lead, today house paint is almost lead-free, leaded gasoline has been phased out, and household plumbing is no longer made with lead materials in the United States.

### How lead affects your child's health

The long-term effects of lead in a child can be severe. They include learning disabilities, decreased growth, hyperactivity, impaired hearing, and even brain damage. If caught early, these effects can be limited by reducing exposure to lead and/or by medical treatment. If you are pregnant, avoid exposing yourself to lead. Lead can pass through your body to your baby. The good news is that there are simple things you can do to help protect your family.

### 1. Get your child tested.

Even children who appear healthy may have high levels of lead. You can't tell if a child has lead poisoning unless you have him or her tested. A blood test takes only 10 minutes, and results should be ready within a week.



Blood tests are usually recommended for:

- Children at ages one and two.
- Children or other family members who have been exposed to high levels of lead.
- Children who should be tested under your state or local screening plan.

To find out where to have your child tested, call your doctor or local health clinic. They can explain what the test results mean, and if more testing will be needed.

### 2. Keep it clean.

Ordinary dust and dirt may contain lead. Children can swallow lead or breathe lead contaminated dust if they play in dust or dirt and then put their fingers or toys in their mouths, or if they eat without washing their hands first.

- Keep the areas where your children play as dust-free and clean as possible.
- Wash pacifiers and bottles after they fall on the floor. Keep extras handy.
- 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. REMEMBER: NEVER MIX AMMONIA AND BLEACH PRODUCTS TOGETHER SINCE THEY CAN FORM A DANGEROUS GAS.
- Thoroughly rinse sponges and mop heads after cleaning dirty and dusty areas.
- Wash toys and stuffed animals regularly.
- Make sure your children wash their hands before meals, nap time, and bedtime.

### 3. Reduce the risk from lead-based paint.

Most homes built before 1978 contain lead-based paint. This paint could be on window frames, walls, the outside of your house, or other surfaces. Tiny pieces of peeling or chipping paint are dangerous if eaten. Lead-based paint in good condition is not usually a problem except in places where painted surfaces rub against each other and create dust. (For example, when you open a window, the painted surfaces rub against each other.)



- Make sure your child does not chew on anything covered with lead-based paint, such as painted window sills, cribs, or playpens.
- Don't burn painted wood. It may contain lead.

#### **4. Don't remove lead-based paint yourself.**

Families have been poisoned by scraping or sanding lead-based paint because these activities generate large amounts of lead dust. Lead dust from repairs or renovations of older buildings can remain in a building long after the work has been completed. Heating paint may release lead into the air. When renovations and repairs are done in your home, make sure the firm is certified and the workers are trained to follow lead-safe work practices. Don't try to remove lead-based paint yourself.

If your home was built before 1978, have your home tested for lead and learn about potential lead hazards. Fix any hazards that you may have. You can get your home checked in one or both of the following ways:

- A paint inspection — Tells you the lead content of every different type of painted surface in your home, but does not tell you if the paint is a hazard or how to deal with it. This is most appropriate when you are buying a home or signing a lease, before you renovate, and to help you determine how to maintain your home for lead safety.
- A risk assessment - an on-site investigation that determines the presence, type, severity, and location of lead-based paint hazards (including lead hazards in paint, dust, and soil) and provides suggested ways to control and reduce the hazards.

- Federal law requires contractors that disturb painted surfaces in homes, child care facilities, and schools built before 1978 to be certified and follow specific work practices. They are also required to give homeowners or tenants a copy of EPA lead brochure "The Lead-Safe Certified Guide to Renovate Right" before renovating six square feet or more of painted surfaces in interior rooms or more than 20 square feet of painted surfaces in exterior projects or window replacement or demolition in homes built before 1978.

All occupants, especially children and pregnant women, should leave the building until all work is finished and a thorough cleanup has been done.

#### **5. Don't bring lead dust into your home.**

If you work in construction, demolition or painting, with batteries, or in a radiator repair shop or lead factory, or if your hobby involves lead, you may unknowingly bring lead into your home on your hands or clothes. You may also be tracking in lead from the soil around your home. Soil very close to homes may be contaminated from lead-based paint on the outside of the building. Soil by roads or highways may be contaminated from years of exhaust fumes from cars and trucks that used leaded gas.

- If you work with lead in your job or hobby, change your clothes and shower before you go home.
- Encourage your children to play in sand or grassy areas instead of dirt which sticks to fingers and toys. Try to keep your children from eating dirt, and make sure they wash their hands when they come inside.



#### **6. Learn more about lead in drinking water.**

The most common sources of lead in drinking water are lead pipes, faucets and fixtures. Lead pipes are more likely to be found in older cities and homes built before 1986. You can't smell or taste lead in drinking water. To find out for certain if you have lead in drinking water, have your water tested. Remember older homes with a private well can also have plumbing materials that contain lead.

#### **Important Steps You Can Take to Reduce Lead in Drinking Water**

- Use only cold water for drinking, cooking and making baby formula. Boiling water does not remove lead from water.
- Flush your home's pipes before drinking the water. Ways to flush your home's pipes include running the tap, taking a shower, doing laundry or doing a load of dishes.
- Regularly clean your faucet's screen (also known as an aerator).
- If you use a filter certified to remove lead, don't forget to read the directions to learn when to change the cartridge. Using a filter after it has expired can make it less effective at removing lead.

Contact your water company to determine if the pipe that connects your home to the water main (called a service line) is made from lead. Your area's water company can also provide information about the lead levels in your system's drinking water.

For more information about lead in drinking water please contact EPA's Safe Drinking Water Hotline at 1-800-426-4791. If you have other questions about lead poisoning prevention, call 1-800 424-LEAD.

Call your local health department or water company to find out about testing your water, or visit [epa.gov/safewater](http://epa.gov/safewater) for EPA's lead in drinking water information. Some states or utilities offer programs to pay for water testing for residents. Contact your state or local water company to learn more.

#### **7. Eat right.**

A child who gets enough iron and calcium will absorb less lead. Foods with iron include eggs, lean red meat, and beans. Dairy products are high in calcium.

- Don't store food or liquids for long periods of time in lead crystal glassware or old or imported pottery.

# Are You Pregnant?

## PREVENT LEAD POISONING START NOW

Lead poisoning is caused by breathing in or swallowing items contaminated with lead. Lead can pass from a mother to her unborn baby. The good news is that **lead poisoning is preventable.**

### Too much lead in your body can

- Put you at risk for miscarriage.
- Cause your baby to be born too early or too small.
- Hurt your baby's brain, kidneys, and nervous system.
- Cause your child to have learning or behavior problems.

### Lead can be found in

- Paint and dust in older homes, especially dust from renovation or repairs.
- Candy, cosmetics, glazed pots, and some traditional medicines and spices from other countries.
- Certain jobs such as auto refinishing, construction, and plumbing.
- Toys and jewelry.
- Soil and drinking water from lead pipes, faucets, and plumbing fixtures.



# Now is the time to keep you and your baby safe from lead poisoning. Here's what you can do:

**1 Watch out for lead in your home.** Most lead comes from paint in homes built before 1978. When old paint cracks and peels, it creates lead dust and lead chips. The dust is so small you cannot see it. You can breathe in lead dust and not even know it.

Home repairs and renovations, such as sanding or scraping paint, in homes built before 1978 can make lead dust.

If you are pregnant or breastfeeding, leave the house when someone is

- Removing lead paint.
- Cleaning up after removing lead paint.
- Remodeling a room that might have lead paint.

**Tip:** If you live in a home built before 1978, have your home inspected by a licensed lead inspector. Find a certified inspector or risk assessor at <https://www.epa.gov/lead>.

**2 Avoid certain jobs or hobbies.** Some jobs can expose you to lead, such as construction and renovation or repair of homes built before 1978, and battery manufacturing or recycling. Some hobbies can expose you to lead, such as renovating homes, making glazed pottery, or shooting at firing ranges.

If someone who lives with you works with or takes part in activities that involve lead, have them change into clean clothing before coming home. Keep their work or activity shoes and tools outside and wash their clothes separately from the rest of the family's clothes.

**3 Talk to your doctor.** Talk to your doctor about any medicines, vitamins, home remedies, or supplements you are taking. Be sure to tell your doctor about any cravings you might have, such as eating dirt or clay, which might contain lead.

**4 Avoid certain foods and cosmetics.** Use caution when eating anything brought into the United States by travelers from other countries. Some candy, candy wrappers, spices and other foods, cosmetics, traditional medicines, and ceremonial or religious powders contain lead. For more information, see <https://www.cdc.gov/nceh/lead/prevention/sources/foods-cosmetics-medicines.htm>.

**5 Store and serve food properly.** Some dishes and serving containers contain lead. Be sure to cook, serve, and store food properly.

- Avoid using imported lead-glazed ceramic pottery.
- Avoid using pewter or brass containers or utensils.
- Avoid using leaded crystal to serve or store beverages.

**6 Eat foods with calcium, iron, and vitamin C.** These foods may help keep lead out of your unborn baby's developing body.

- Calcium is in milk, yogurt, cheese, and green leafy vegetables such as spinach.
- Iron is in lean red meat, beans, peanut butter, and cereals.
- Vitamin C is in oranges, green and red peppers, broccoli, tomatoes, and juices.

More information about the topics in this fact sheet can be found at <https://www.cdc.gov/nceh/lead/>