

What I Need to Know About Lead Poisoning

Health Effects of Lead Exposure

Children are at greater risk for lead poisoning because their bodies more readily absorb lead. Lead poisoning affects nearly every system in the body. Lead poisoning often occurs with no obvious symptoms. A blood lead test is the only way to know if your child has lead exposure.

Elevated Blood Lead Levels

Extremely high blood lead level can cause severe neurologic problems, including seizure, coma, and death. Elevated blood lead levels can impair mental and physical development, and have adverse health effects on the central nervous system, kidneys, and blood cells. Extremely high blood lead levels can cause severe neurologic problems, including seizure, coma, and death.

Symptoms of lead poisoning include:

- Tiredness or crankiness
- No appetite
- Headaches
- Nausea or vomiting
- Constipation
- Not able to sleep
- Clumsiness or weakness
- Lower IQ levels
- Shortened attention span
- Increase in behavioral problems

Sources of Lead Exposure

- ✓ **Lead-Based Paint.** Many homes built before 1978 have lead-based paint. It becomes dangerous when it peels, chips, cracks, becomes damaged, or turns to dust.
- ✓ **Lead Dust.** When lead-based paint deteriorates, is scraped, sanded, or heated, it turns into lead dust. Dust also forms when painted surfaces bump or rub together (windows, windowsills, doors, stairs, railings, and porches).
- ✓ **Lead-Contaminated Soil.** Found around the outside of homes or structures that contain lead-based paint, and around busy roadways contaminated by gasoline used in automobiles before the 1980s.
- ✓ **Take-Home Exposure.** Some jobs and hobbies may expose people to lead. You can bring lead home to your family on your clothes and body.
- ✓ **Imported Candies or Foods.** Candy, wrappers, and certain ethnic foods may contain lead. Inspected candy products can be found at: www.leadinmexicancandy.com.
- ✓ **Jewelry and Toys.** For information regarding recalls of jewelry and toys, visit the Consumer Product Safety Commission website at www.cpsc.gov.
- ✓ **Imported Home Remedies and Cosmetics.** Numerous cases of lead poisoning have occurred from home remedies and cosmetics, particularly imported from Latin America, Southeast Asia, the Indian subcontinent, and the Middle East. For a list of remedies and cosmetics that contain lead, visit the following website: www.dshs.state.tx.us/lead/parents.shtm.

How Lead Gets Into the Body

Touching lead is not the problem. It becomes dangerous when you breathe in or swallow lead.

- **Breathing It** - You can breathe in lead if dust in the air contains lead, especially during renovations that disturb painted surfaces.
- **Swallowing It** - You can swallow lead by:
 - Putting unwashed hands or other objects covered with lead dust in your mouth
 - Eating or drinking without washing hands or face
 - Eating foods or drinking liquids stored in pottery, dishes, or glassware that contain lead
- **Special Cases** – A pregnant woman with lead poisoning could transfer it to her unborn child through the placenta. Some evidence indicates lead can be transferred through breast milk.

How to Protect Your Family from Lead Exposure

Diet and Health - Feed your child three healthy meals and two nutritious snacks each day. Your child's stomach absorbs more lead when it is empty. Foods high in **calcium** and **iron** help keep lead out of your child's blood. For more information on a healthy diet, download [Get the Lead out with Good Nutrition](#).

In addition to a healthy diet, follow these tips to protect your child from lead:

- Wash your child's hands and face before eating, drinking, sleeping, and after playtime.
- Wash toys and pacifiers at least once a day.
- Do not use water from the hot tap for drinking, cooking or preparing infant formula.
- Do not cook or store food in cans, pottery, ceramics or leaded crystal.

Lead in Paint

- Do not let children chew on painted surfaces or put paint chips in their mouth.
- Keep children away from surfaces where paint is peeling or damaged.
- Do not remove any paint that might contain lead; a professional should do this.
- Do not live in, or spend time in, a house where lead-based paint is being removed.

Lead in Soil

- Do not let children play in soil that might contain lead.
- Thoroughly wash vegetables and fruits to remove any soil.
- To keep lead dust from entering your home, use small washable rugs at each entrance and ask everyone take off shoes at the door.

Lead in Household Dust

- Use soap and water to mop floors, wash windowsills, countertops, and other surfaces that may have lead dust.
- Do not reuse cleaning rags, sponges, or mops until washed. Wash these items separately from other family laundry.
- Steam clean carpets, or use other cleaning methods that do not raise dust.
- Do not bring lead home with you from work. If possible, shower and change clothes at work. Wash work clothes separately from family's laundry.
- Do not use lead-containing materials for hobbies inside your house. Work with these hobbies only in a well-ventilated area away from the house.

Source: Texas Department of State Health Services – <http://www.dshs.state.tx.us/lead>

For more information on lead and childhood lead poisoning, contact the Texas Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Program (TX CLPPP) at 1-800-588-1248.