

Lead Poisoning



What is lead poisoning?

Lead is a metal that can be harmful to humans. Usually lead poisoning happens when a person eats or breathes in small amounts of lead in paint dust or common household items. Children are at higher risk of poisoning. In children, too much lead in the blood can cause low blood count, growth and behavior problems and learning problems. In adults, it can cause pain, numbness, tingling, weakness and memory loss. In pregnant women, too much lead can lead to miscarriage or hurt the unborn baby.

What are the symptoms of lead poisoning in children?

Children with lead poisoning may not look or act sick. Sometimes symptoms may be mistaken for other illnesses, such as an upset stomach. Here are some possible signs of lead poisoning:

- Tiredness or loss of energy
- Hyperactivity
- Irritability or crankiness
- Reduced attention span
- Poor appetite
- Weight loss
- Difficulty sleeping
- Constipation or stomach aches

What are some common lead exposure sources?

Houses built before 1978 may have lead paint. When the paint breaks down, it forms dust that people can inhale or ingest. Children can ingest this dust by crawling on the floor and mouthing objects. Parents who work with lead may bring lead dust home on their clothes or shoes, so they should remove clothing before entering the home. There are other sources found at home that may contain lead:

- Soil contaminated with lead
- Old plumbing leaking lead into tap water
- Lead fishing sinkers and bullets
- Plastic and painted furniture; old bathtubs
- Imported painted toys; toy jewelry
- Older, imported mini-blinds
- Dishware
- Brass keys and fixtures
- Food made or stored in lead-glazed ceramics
- Ceramic tiles
- Stained glass
- Lipstick
- Alternative medicines, spices, candy, makeup and toys from other countries

What can I do to protect my family against lead poisoning?

- Ask about lead paint and pipes when buying, renting or renovating a home.
- Minimize your child's time around peeling or chipping paint.
- Do not wear outdoor shoes indoors. Lead in soil can be carried indoors.
- If you suspect your home might have lead-based paint, wet-wipe floors weekly and window sills routinely to remove lead dust.
- Cover bare ground areas around the house with mulch, grass or plants.
- Wash hands regularly, especially before eating.



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- Wash children's toys often.
- Flush water pipes. Turn on water and let it run for 30-60 seconds before using.
- Read labels: look for lead-free dishes, glasses, toys, jewelry and other products.
- Avoid storing food in open cans, pottery, ceramics, pewter, brass or lead crystal containers.
- If you work with lead, you need to shampoo, shower and change clothes before coming home. Wash your work clothes separately from the rest of the family's clothes.
- Offer your family foods that can help protect against lead poisoning. These foods are high in:
 - ⇒ Iron—lean meats, fish, cereals high in iron, dried fruits such as raisins and prunes
 - ⇒ Calcium—milk, yogurt cheese, green leafy vegetables
 - ⇒ Vitamin C—citrus fruits and juices, tomatoes, tomato juice, green peppers

Ask your healthcare provider about lead testing!

A blood test is the only way to find out about lead poisoning. Low-cost testing options are available.