Lead awareness and your children

About 1 in 22 children in America have high levels of lead in their blood, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. 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, house paint is almost lead-free, leaded gasoline has been phased out, and household plumbing is no longer made with lead materials.

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 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 about ten minutes, and results should be ready within a week.

- Children ages 1 and 2.
- Children or other family members who have been exposed to high levels of lead.

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 extra hands.
- 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. 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.

3. Reduce the risk from lead paint.

Most homes built before 1960 contain leaded paint. Some homes built as recently as 1978 may also contain lead paint. This paint could be on window frames, walls, doors, and other surfaces. Tiny pieces of peeling or chipping paint are dangerous if eaten. Lead 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 window sill, wall, or other painted surface rubs against each other and creates dust.)

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

4. Don’t remove lead paint yourself

Families have been poisoned by scraping or sanding lead paint because these activities generate large amounts of lead dust. Lead dust from repairs or renovations of older buildings can remain in the building long after the work is completed. Heating paint may release lead into the air.

- Ask your local or state health department if they will test your home for lead paint. Some testers are not certified. Home test kits cannot detect small amounts of lead under some conditions.
- Hire a person with special training for correcting lead paint problems to remove lead paint from your home, someone who knows how to do this work safely and has the proper equipment to clean up the job until all work is finished.
Protect Your Children From Lead Poisoning

1. Get your child tested for lead poisoning, even if he or she seems healthy.

2. 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.

3. Reduce the risk of lead paint. Make sure your child is not chewing on anything covered with lead paint.

4. Don’t try to remove lead paint yourself.

5. Don’t bring lead dust into your home from work or a hobby.

6. Have your water tested. If the cold water hasn’t been used for more than a few hours, let it run for 15–30 seconds before drinking it or cooking with it.

7. Eat right and don’t store food in high-lead pottery.

Lead poisoning is a serious problem for young children—the younger the child, the greater the risk.

For More Information

EPA’s Safe Drinking Water Hotline National Lead Information Center
1-800-426-4791 1-800-424-LEAD
Visit our web site
http://www.epa.gov/lead

United States Environmental Protection Agency • Office of Pollution Prevention and Toxics • Office of Ground Water and Drinking Water

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