



Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention

1. Why is lead harmful?

Lead can damage a child's brain and nervous system. It's especially dangerous for unborn children and children under age 6, because their rapidly developing bodies absorb more lead. Lead can also cause permanent learning and behavioral problems, making it difficult for children to succeed in school.

2. How do children get lead poisoning?

Most children get lead poisoning by eating paint, soil, or dust that contains lead. This occurs when:

- Lead-based paint chips or peels from walls.
- Lead contaminates soil along roadways near buildings and homes. Soil became contaminated from use of leaded gas and deteriorating paint in the past.
- Lead dust settles on toys, fingers, and other objects children put in their mouths.

Other sources of lead poisoning can include:

- Imported toys, jewelry, candies, and food products.
- Handmade, imported ceramics made with lead-based glaze or paint.
- Traditional home remedies such as Azarcon, Greta, and Pay-loo-ah.
- Traditional cosmetics such as Kohl and Surma.
- Clothes and shoes from workers exposed to lead. Such jobs include painting, construction, gardening, making batteries, and repairing radiators.

3. How do you know if a child has lead poisoning?

A blood test is the only way to know if a child has lead poisoning. Most children with lead poisoning do not look or act sick.

Children at highest risk may live or spend time in housing built before 1978, or in government-assisted health programs. Children may also be at risk in housing with chipping paint or unsafe repairs and remodeling.

4. When should children be tested?

Children at risk of lead poisoning should be tested:

- At ages 1 and 2.
- Between the ages of 3 and 6, if not tested at ages 1 and 2.

Parents who think their child may have been exposed to lead should talk to their doctor about getting a blood lead test.

5. How can I prevent childhood lead poisoning?

Some basic ways to prevent childhood lead poisoning include:

- Taking off or wiping your shoes before entering your home.
- Washing your children's hands and toys, often.
- Cleaning any surfaces covered in lead-based paint inside or outside of the home with a wet mop or wet cloth, often.

Use lead-safe work practices in buildings built before 1978. These include:

- Using plastic sheeting on furniture and the ground.
- Wetting surfaces before sanding and scraping.
- Mopping the area with an all-purpose cleaner at the end of the day.

Good nutrition helps children's bodies resist lead poisoning. Feed children three meals and two healthy snacks each day to help their body resist lead poisoning, including:

- Calcium-rich foods (milk, cheese, yogurt, canned salmon, and tofu)
- Iron-rich foods (lean meats, beans, iron fortified cereals and grains, fish, raisins)
- Vitamin C-rich foods (fresh, canned or frozen fruits, fruit juices)

6. How can I make sure I don't bring lead home from my job?

- Change into clean clothes and shoes before getting into your car or going home. Bag dirty clothes and shoes.
- Wash your face and hands with soap and water before leaving work.
- Take a shower and wash your hair as soon as you get home. It is better to shower at work if you can.
- Wash work clothes separately from all other clothes. Run the empty washing machine again after the work clothes to rinse the lead out.

7. Where can I go for more information?

The Los Angeles County Department of Public Health Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Program can provide you with more information. You can reach them at 1-800-524-5323 or visit their website <http://www.publichealth.lacounty.gov/lead/>.

Sources

1. *Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention*. California Department of Public Health. www.cdph.ca.gov/programs/CLPPB