

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT LEAD

What is lead?

Lead is a soft metal found in the earth that has been used by man for centuries. Lead has been used in many products such as, paints, gasoline, pipes and plumbing fixtures, glass and crystal, ceramic glazes, ammunition, brass and pewter, vinyl or plastic, and batteries.

Why is lead harmful?

Lead can damage a child's brain and nervous system. It's especially dangerous for unborn babies 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.

How do children get lead poisoning?

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

- Lead-based paint chips or peels from walls.
- Lead contaminates soil around the home.
- Lead dust settles on floors and windowsills, or on toys and other objects children put in their mouths

Children that live in housing built before 1978 with chipping or deteriorated paint, or those that were recently remodeled, are at higher risk for lead poisoning. Also at higher risk are children who live near businesses that generate or release lead dust into the environment.

Other sources of lead poisoning can include:

- Clothes and shoes from workers exposed to lead. Such jobs include painting, construction, making batteries, scrap metal and battery recycling, repairing radiators, and day laborers.
- Traditional home remedies such as Azarcon, Greta, and Pay-loo-ah.
- Traditional cosmetics such as Kohl and Surma.
- Handmade, imported ceramic pottery made with lead-based glaze or paint
- Imported toys, jewelry, candies, and food products.
- Businesses in the neighborhood such as lead battery recycling, radiator repair, tire repair, general automotive shops, and scrap metal recycling.

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.

What happens after a blood lead test?

Test samples are analyzed by a laboratory to determine the amount of lead in the blood. Blood lead levels are measured in micrograms per deciliter (ug/dL). The results of each lead test are reported to the California Department of Public Health and also shared with the local health departments. In Los Angeles County, all blood levels are reported to the Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Program.

What does my child's lead level mean?

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), if a child's blood level is above 5ug/dL, they should be seen by a doctor or medical provider. The child should get tested again between 1 month and 6 months to make sure that the level does not go up.

If the level is above 10ug/dL, Los Angeles County Public Health may contact the family to investigate the source of poisoning and to provide education on how to reduce the child's blood lead level.

What can be done to reduce my child's blood lead level?

Most importantly is making sure that the child is not exposed to any more lead. If your home or apartment was built before 1978, please call our program to tell you how to safely to eliminate peeling paint and clean up lead dust. Lead contaminated soil may also be a source of exposure. Avoiding traditional home remedies (such as Azarcon or Greta). You can learn how to test your imported glazed ceramic pottery/dishes for lead. Once the source of the child's lead exposure is removed, his/her blood lead level should start decreasing. Good nutrition with foods rich in iron, calcium and vitamin C, can help reduce the amount of lead that a child absorbs.

Your child's doctor will guide you on this, but you can also contact the Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Program at 1-800-524-5323.

Is there any medicine that can lower my child's blood lead level?

Yes, but it is usually used when a child's level is above 45 ug/dL. This treatment has side effects and must be given only under a doctor's care. There is no medicine that you can buy at your local drug or nutrition store that lowers blood lead levels.

For more information: **1-800-LA-4-LEAD (1-800-524-5323)**
www.publichealth.lacounty.gov/lead