



Lead Poisoning

Understanding this serious health risk

You & Your Child

Lead is a powerful poison. Exposure to lead is linked to problems ranging from irritability to brain damage and death, depending on the level of exposure.

Lead poisoning can affect anyone. But children are especially vulnerable. Their rapidly developing nervous systems are particularly sensitive to the effects of lead. About one out of every six children in the United States have levels of lead in their blood that are toxic.

Lead is found in paint, water, and soil. You should make sure that your home is free of lead-based paint and that the lead level in your drinking water is acceptably low. The risk of lead exposure is greater if you live in a home built before 1950.

To better protect your child and family it is important to understand the basics of lead exposure and what you can do to limit exposure.

On Back

About lead and some steps you can take to limit exposure.



A publication of the University of Pittsburgh Office of Child Development made possible with help from the Frank and Theresa Caplan Fund For Early Childhood Development and Parenting Education.

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What are the dangers of lead exposure?

Lead poisoning can lead to a number of problems in children, depending on the level of exposure.

- Problems paying attention, hyperactivity, and irritability can result from being exposed to even small amounts of lead.
- Learning and reading problems, delayed growth, and hearing loss can result from being exposed to higher lead levels.
- Permanent brain damage and death can result from being exposed to very high levels of lead.
- Parents exposed to lead risk having a problem birth. For example, men with high levels of lead in their blood for more than five years are more likely to have a premature child or a child of low birth weight.

How are families exposed to lead?

In the home, the main sources of lead are usually lead-based paint and drinking water carried through lead pipes.

Lead-based paints are especially harmful to children who chew on painted toys and furnishings and eat paint peelings from the walls.

Other possible sources of lead poisoning include some glass and ceramics. Constant exposure to the exhaust fumes of motor vehicles that use fuel containing tetraethyl lead is also believed to cause lead poisoning, especially in children.

Lead levels in the environment are usually higher in the spring and summer.

Replace brass faucets

Some water faucets contain brass, which is a copper and lead alloy. Hot water may cause lead to be extracted from brass and add it to your water.

You should replace brass faucets with stainless steel.

If cannot replace your brass faucet, let cold water run for at least 10 seconds before taking a drink or using it for cooking.

Check ceramics, they may pose a risk of lead

Although lead levels are now low, lead found in certain coffee mugs and other ceramics may get into food. Be sure that your food containers – especially potter glazes – are not made with lead-based paint.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) recommends:

- Pregnant women should avoid drinking from ceramic mugs.
- Do not feed babies from lead crystal bottles.
- Don't store acidic foods, such as fruit juices, in ceramic containers.

You can test for lead in ceramic ware

There is a test kit available to check if lead is seeping from your ceramic ware. Call your local FDA office to ask about the kit. The FDA telephone number is in the blue pages of the phone book.

You can also call the National Lead Information Center for information on lead testing kits. The toll-free number is 1-800-532-3394.

Take other precautions to reduce lead exposure

- Don't use antique dinnerware because it's more likely to contain lead.
- Follow warnings on label, such as "Not for food use," and "For decorative purposes only."

Ask your doctor about blood screening for lead

Ask your doctor about screening your child for exposure to lead, especially if your home was built before 1950.

Screening for lead can be done with a test of your child's blood performed by your physician or public health agency.

Early identification and treatment of lead exposure reduces the chance that children will suffer permanent damage. Lead poisoning is treated by removing the child from the sources of lead and with medication to remove lead from the body.

