



# 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 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.

## 2. 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 along roadways near buildings and homes.
- 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 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.

## 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.

All children enrolled in government assisted programs should be tested at ages 1 and 2. A child can be tested at any age if parents think their child may have been exposed to lead. Talk to your health care provider for more information.

## 5. How can I prevent childhood lead poisoning?

In homes and apartments built before 1978:

- Repair or repaint peeling paint using lead safe work practices. These include:
  - Using plastic sheeting on furniture and the ground to collect paint chips and dust.
  - Wetting surfaces before sanding and scraping to prevent lead dust.
  - Mopping the area with an all-purpose cleaner at the end of each work day.
- Don't let dust collect on window sills, counters and other horizontal surfaces. Clean these areas frequently with a wet cloth so that dust is not stirred up.

Some other 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.

Good nutrition helps children's bodies resist lead poisoning. Feed children three meals and two healthy snacks each day, 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?

Lead from your work can get on your clothes and shoes and then contaminate your car and home.

- Before leaving work, wash your face and hands with soap and water. It is better to shower at work if you can.
- Change into clean clothes and shoes before getting into your car or going home. Place your dirty clothes and shoes in a bag.
- Take a shower and wash your hair as soon as you get home. 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. Call 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](http://www.cdph.ca.gov/programs/CLPPB)