Lead Poisoning Prevention

Lead poisoning is the harmful buildup of lead in the body. **Even tiny amounts can be very harmful to a young child's development.** Children under the age of 6 are at highest risk for lead poisoning. This is because they put non-food objects and their fingers in their mouths.

Lead poisoning can cause brain damage in children. Lower IQs, attention deficit (ADD) problems, and behavior problems can result from lead poisoning. Sometimes brain damage cannot be reversed, even with treatment.

Children who live in older homes, where lead paint has been used, are at highest risk. Even if non-leaded paint has been applied over leaded paint, chipped plaster or paint can be sources of lead. There are many other sources of lead. A few of them are listed here:

- Soil and dust
- Lead crystal glassware, lead-glazed pottery
- Some children’s toys and jewelry (see Lead in Toys section)
- Burning, sanding or heat-stripping painted wood
- Folk remedies and cosmetics - kohl (surma), greta, azarcon
- Some imported foods and candies
- Lead pipes used in plumbing and the water that has run through these pipes

**Your child’s risk**

The Ohio Department of Health Risk Assessment asks these questions to find out the risk for lead poisoning. Does your child:

- Live in a house or often visit a building older than 1978? This includes a daycare center, preschool or home of a baby sitter or relative.
- Have a brother, sister or playmate who has had lead poisoning?
- Have frequent contact with an adult whose hobby or work involves lead? Examples are construction, welding, pottery making, painting and casting ammunition.
- Is the child or his or her mother an immigrant or refugee?

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Your child’s risk continued

- Did the child’s mother have known lead exposure during her pregnancy?
- Does your child live near an active or former lead smelter, battery recycling plant or other such industry?

If your child is younger than 6 years and you answer “yes” or “unknown” to any of the above questions, he or she is at risk for lead poisoning. Your child’s doctor can order a blood lead test if you are concerned your child has been exposed to lead. Doctors are required to provide a blood lead test if your child is on Medicaid, if you live in a high risk zip code or if you answered “yes” or “unknown” to any of the questions listed above.

Lead in toys

- If you think your child has been exposed to a toy that contains lead, remove the toy right away.
- Only a certified laboratory can accurately test a toy for lead. Home testing kits may not be reliable for finding low levels of lead.

Signs of lead poisoning

Most children with lead poisoning do not have symptoms. A blood lead test is the only way to know if a child has lead poisoning. Symptoms, when they do occur, may include:

- headache
- stomach ache or cramps
- weight loss

Signs of severe lead poisoning include:

- vomiting
- dizziness
- seizures
- constipation or diarrhea
- fussiness or crankiness
- trouble sleeping
- joint pain
- listlessness (no energy)

How to prevent lead poisoning

- Serve foods high in calcium, vitamin C and iron. Usually children with lead poisoning do not have enough calcium or iron in their bodies. Vitamin C-rich foods and iron-rich foods work together to reduce lead absorption. Some good sources of vitamin C are:
  - Oranges, orange juice
  - Grapefruits, grapefruit juice
  - Tomatoes, tomato juice
  - Green peppers
How to prevent lead poisoning, continued

- Teach your child to practice good hand washing before meals and after playing outdoors. Thoroughly wash his or her hands with soap and water if your child has played in bare soil.
- Use an all-purpose cleaning solution to damp-mop dusty areas. Keep your house as dust-free as possible. Ask your health department for information about lead clean-up or removal.
- Avoid using home remedies and cosmetics that may contain lead.
- Use only cold water from the tap for drinking, cooking and making baby formula. Hot water is more likely to contain higher levels of lead. Allow water to run for 2 to 3 minutes before using.
- Shower and change clothes after working with lead-based products. Such products might include bullets (making or firing them) or pewter items.
- Never allow small children or pregnant women in the area where homes built before 1978 are being remodeled.
- Do not store food in lead-glazed pottery. Imported pottery is more likely to be lead-glazed. Do not let children drink from lead crystal baby bottles or glassware.

Follow-up care

All children at risk for lead poisoning should get a blood lead test at ages 1 and 2 years, up to 6 years of age if a child has never been tested. If your child has lead poisoning or is at high risk for lead poisoning, he or she may need to have a blood lead test more often. Your healthcare provider will contact you and the Health Department will follow up with you if the level of blood lead is high.

You can request more information about lead poisoning from:

- Your local health department
- The Ohio Department of Health
  Phone: 614-466-5332
- The Environmental Protection Agency Internet website:

If you have any questions, be sure to ask your child’s doctor or nurse.

For directions to the nearest Laboratory Service Center, please call Laboratory Services at 800-934-6575 or visit NationwideChildrens.org/Lab.