

What Parents Need to Know About Lead Poisoning

Why is it important to children?

No **safe** blood lead level in children has been identified. Even low levels of lead in blood have been shown to negatively affect a child's **intelligence, ability to pay attention, and academic achievement**. The effects of lead poisoning are **permanent**.

Effects on children

Exposure to lead can seriously harm a child's health and cause well-documented adverse effects such as:

- Damage to the brain and nervous system
- Slowed growth and development
- Learning and behavior problems
- Hearing and speech problems

This can cause:

- Lower IQ
- Decreased ability to pay attention
- Underperformance in school

There is also evidence that childhood exposure to lead can cause long-term harm.



Where is it found?

- Homes built before 1978 probably contain **lead-based paint**. When the paint peels and cracks, it makes lead dust. Children can be poisoned when they swallow or breathe in lead dust.
- Certain **water pipes** may contain lead.
- Lead can be found in some **products** such as toys and jewelry.
- Lead is sometimes in **candies** imported from other countries or **traditional home remedies**.
- Certain **jobs and hobbies** involve working with lead-based products, like stain glass work, and may cause parents to bring lead into the home.
- Children who **live near airports** may be exposed to lead in air and soil from aviation gas.

Lead testing

If a child may have been exposed to lead, parents **should talk to their child's health care provider** about getting a blood lead test. Two types of blood tests may be used.

- A **finger-prick or heel-prick (capillary) test** is usually the first step to determine if a child has lead in their blood. While finger-prick tests can provide fast results, they also can produce higher results if lead on the skin is captured in the sample.
- A **venous blood draw** takes blood from the child's vein. This type of test can take a few days to receive results and is often used to confirm blood lead levels seen in the first capillary test.



Lead Poisoning Prevention

- Primary prevention is the **removal of lead hazards** from the environment before a child is lead exposed. It is the most effective way to ensure that children do not experience harmful long-term effects of lead exposure.
- Secondary prevention includes **blood lead testing and follow-up care and referral**. It remains an essential safety net for children who may already be exposed to lead.



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