



LEAD and CHILDHOOD LEAD POISONING

Frequently Asked Questions

What is lead poisoning?

- Lead is a naturally occurring metal that has been used in many products.
- Lead is harmful to the human body.
- There is no known safe level of lead in the body.
- Small amounts of lead can build up in the body and cause lifelong learning and behavior problems. Buildup of lead in the body is referred to as lead poisoning.
- Lead Poisoning is California's most common environmental illness found in children.
- LEAD POISONING IS PREVENTABLE!
- The United States has taken many steps to remove sources of lead, but lead is still around us.
- Lead in paint was severely restricted in 1978.
- Lead solder in food cans was banned in the 1980s.
- Lead in gasoline was removed during the early 1990s.

Remodeling a home built prior to 1978?

- Hire a [State Certified Lead Contractor](#) to reduce the lead hazards in your home and yard. Contact Nevada County Environmental Health at 530-265-1222 Ext. 3 to see if a permit is required.
- If you plan to repaint or remodel your home, hire a State-certified lead contractor if you are removing lead.
- If you are remodeling your pre 1978 home then verify your contractor has a Repair, Repaint and Remodel Certification on their contractor's license.
- If you plan to do the work yourself, get the EPA's free how-to booklet [here](#).
- Lead safe work practices are required. [Click here](#) to learn more.

How can I have my home tested for lead?

Paint on structures built prior to 1978 is legally presumed to be lead-based, unless a State-certified Inspector/Assessor has quantitative testing to show otherwise. Only a [California-Certified Inspector/Assessor](#) can perform lead hazard evaluations.

What are common sources of lead?

- Lead-based paint (pre-1978). It may have been used both inside and outside of a home and on furniture or objects in the home. Children may eat paint chips or chew on the surfaces of cribs, highchairs, windows, woodwork, walls, doors, or railings.
- Lead-contaminated soil. Lead may be in the soil where children play, especially near busy roadways or factories. The lead from gasoline used for many years has settled onto soil and is difficult to remove. This soil may also be tracked inside on shoes and clothing.
- Lead-contaminated dust from paint or soil. It clings to windowsills, floors, doorways and children's toys, and is dangerous to young children who crawl and often put their hands and other objects in their mouths.
- Take-home exposure in the dust brought home on clothing, equipment, or in the car or truck driven from work. Lead dust can also come from hobbies that use lead.
- Some common jobs and hobbies that use lead include: Battery manufacturing, radiator repair, construction, soldering, recycling, painting, demolition, scrap metal recycling, working with stained glass, pottery making, target shooting, and casting fishing weights.
- Imported food in cans that are sealed with lead solder. Some countries other than the United States still allow lead solder in food cans. Cans that have lead solder have very wide seams.
- Imported home remedies and imported cosmetics may contain lead. They often are imported from the Middle East, Southeast Asia, India, the Dominican Republic, or Mexico. The remedies are often bright yellow or orange in color. Examples include: Alarcon, Alkohl, Azarcon, Bali goli, Bint al zahab, Coral, Greta, Farouk, Ghasard, Kandu, Kohl, Liga, Litargirio, Lozeena, Pay-loo-ah, Sindoor, and Surma. There are many others.
- Imported or handmade pottery and tableware with leaded glaze. The lead from the glaze gets into food and beverages when these ceramics are used for cooking or storing food.
- Imported candies or foods, especially from Mexico, containing chili or tamarind may contain lead. Lead can be found in candy, wrappers, pottery containers, and in certain ethnic foods, such as chapulines (dried grasshoppers).
- Metal jewelry. Lead has been found in inexpensive children's jewelry sold in vending machines across the country. It also has been found in inexpensive metal amulets worn for good luck or protection. Some costume jewelry designed for adults has also been found to contain lead. It is important to make sure that children don't handle, mouth or swallow any jewelry.

Who should worry about lead poisoning?

- Children under six years old and fetuses are at greatest risk of harmful health effects from lead poisoning.
 - Their brains and nervous systems are still forming.
 - They frequently crawl on floors or furniture contaminated with lead dust and put their hands or other objects in their mouths.
 - More of the lead that gets into their mouth is taken up into their bodies.
 - Much of the lead is stored in their bones.
 - Lead can be measured in their blood and remains in their bodies for a long time.

- Those children at high risk of getting lead into their bodies are:
 - Young children under six years of age who spend time in homes, childcare centers, or buildings built before 1978 that have chipping or peeling paint. (The old paint may still have lead in it.)
 - Young children who play in bare soil. (They may get it in their mouths.)
 - Young children who eat non-food items. (This behavior is known as “pica.”) This may be more common in children with a diet low in iron and calcium.
 - Children who have recently come from or who spend time in other countries where more lead is found.
 - Infants born to mothers with an elevated level of lead in their blood would be at risk for lead poisoning. Lead crosses the placenta and has harmful effects on the fetus. Pregnant women exposed to lead should ask their doctor about a blood test.
 - Adults who work in jobs or hobbies where they work with lead may bring the lead dust home on their clothes or equipment and expose household members.

How does lead harm a child?

- Lead poisoning can harm a child’s nervous system and brain when they are still forming.
- Lead can lead to a low blood count (anemia).
- Small amounts of lead in the body can make it hard for children to learn, pay attention, and succeed in school.
- Higher amounts of lead exposure can damage the nervous system, kidneys, and other major organs. Very high exposure can lead to seizures or death.

How do I know if my child has lead poisoning?

- Most children who have lead poisoning do not look or act sick. Symptoms, if present, may be confused with common childhood complaints, such as stomachache, crankiness, headaches, or loss of appetite.
- The only way to know if your child has lead poisoning is for the child to get a blood test for lead. Talk to your child’s health care provider to see if your child is at risk for lead poisoning. Your child may need a blood test for lead.
- Any infant or child who is thought to be at risk or comes in contact with items that may contain lead should be tested.

Can lead poisoning be treated?

- Yes, however, the best approach is to stop your children from coming into contact with lead.
- The most common way to treat lead poisoning in children is to find the lead source and remove it from their environment.
- Few children have high enough levels of lead in their blood that they require a medicine called a chelating agent. A chelating agent is a type of medicine that helps to remove the lead from the child’s body.

What are some simple steps to protect my child from lead poisoning?

- Wash your child’s hands and face frequently, especially before eating.
- Wash toys, countertops and windowsills and wet mop floors weekly with an all-purpose detergent.
- Don’t consume imported foods that come in cans with wide seams.

- Avoid giving children imported candy, chapulines or snacks containing chili or tamarind.
- Feed your child regular meals with a diet high in calcium, iron, and vitamin C and low in fat. See the section below on healthy diet.
- Clean up paint chips and peeling paint safely. Nevada County Environmental Health Department can give you information on safe cleaning.
- Keep furniture away from damaged paint. Pay special attention to keeping cribs, beds, highchairs, and playpens away from damaged paint.
- Allow cold water to run for a few minutes in the morning before using it for drinking, cooking, or mixing formula in case there may be lead in your household pipes. Use only cold water from the tap for drinking or in food preparation. You can get your water tested at an approved accredited laboratory.
- Avoid using handmade, older, imported dishes or crystal for food or drink preparation, storage, or serving, unless you are sure they do not contain lead.
- Avoid using remedies or cosmetics that contain lead.
- Take off your shoes before entering the house. (Wipe shoes off - this will help prevent lead dust and soil from getting into your house.)
- Don't let your child play in areas where bare soil is exposed.
- Vacuum carpets frequently to reduce household dust, using a vacuum with a HEPA filter.
- Change out of work clothes before entering the house or being in contact with family members. If you work with lead at your job or hobby, take a shower at your workplace, if possible. Otherwise, shower and remove clothing immediately upon returning home. Handle clothing carefully and wash separately.
- When moving into a home, ask the owner about any problems with lead and know the age of the building.
- Before remodeling, ask a trained professional to test the paint in your house. If lead is in the paint, learn how to handle it safely. Brochures are available.

How can healthy foods protect my child from lead poisoning?

A good diet can help prevent lead from getting into your child's body. These suggestions provide your child with a healthy diet and also prevent lead from being absorbed into your child's body. Your child should:

- Eat regular meals and healthy snacks (four to six times a day).
- Eat calcium-rich foods (cheese, milk, spinach, salmon, yogurt, tofu, and leafy greens).
- Eat iron-rich foods (lean red meat, chicken or turkey without skin, raisins, beans, oatmeal, and split peas).
- Eat vitamin C to help the body absorb iron (fruit juice, oranges, grapefruit, tomatoes, broccoli, kiwi, and strawberries).
- Reduce fatty foods such as fried foods, fast foods, and "junk" foods (donuts, potato chips, and cupcakes). However, some fat in the diet is very important for brain development, especially under age two.
- Milk and butter are healthier sources of fat.

Reporting a lead hazard?

Report a lead hazard to Nevada County Environmental Health via phone, at 530-265-1222 Ext. 3, or [online](#).