

LEAD FACT SHEET

What is lead?

Lead is a naturally occurring soft, blue-gray metal found in small amounts in the earth's crust. Lead can be found in all parts of the environment. Much of it comes from human activities including burning fossil fuels, mining, and manufacturing.

How can you be exposed to lead?

Exposure to lead can occur from contaminated air, water, food, and dust or dirt. People can be exposed if lead is used in their jobs or hobbies. Many homes built before 1978 contain lead-based paint and the water pipes may contain lead solder. Children can be exposed from eating lead-based paint chips or playing in lead-contaminated soil. Today in the United States, lead is no longer added to paint and gasoline products but continues to be present in items such as batteries, solder, ammunition and roofing materials. Lead also exists in some food cans that are improperly sealed, pottery that has been improperly glazed, and health-care products or folk remedies.

How can lead affect your health?

The effects of lead are the same whether it enters the body through breathing or swallowing. Lead can affect almost every organ and system in your body. Exposure to high lead levels can damage the brain and kidneys; affect a child's growth; and cause learning, behavioral and hearing problems. Lead exposure is more dangerous for young and unborn children because lead is more easily absorbed into their growing bodies. Harmful health effects may even persist beyond childhood.

What are the symptoms of lead exposure?

Most people do not experience symptoms at low levels of exposure. However, at high levels you would likely have:

- Headaches
- Vomiting
- Poor appetite and weight loss
- Tiredness
- Constipation and stomach pain
- Nervousness

How can you reduce your exposure to lead?

Outside the home:

- Do not try to remove lead paint yourself. Improper removal can make the situation worse. Contact a qualified contractor.
- Keep your family, especially children, away from areas where lead paint is chipping or peeling.
- Plant bushes or grass in bare dirt areas around the house.

Inside the home:

- Clean floors, window sills, doorframes and baseboards with soap and water at least once a week.
- After cleaning, wash the cleaning rags separately from family laundry.
- Wash children's toys, bottles and pacifiers often.
- Wash children's hands before meals and at bedtime.
- Keep all cosmetics and non-food items out of children's mouth.
- Replace old vinyl mini blinds.
- Do not use glazed pottery to cook, serve or store food unless it is lead-free.
- Do not store liquids in lead crystal containers. Use plastic or stainless steel containers.
- Do not give a child home remedies such as Azarcon (a bright reddish-orange powder, which contains 90% lead); Greta (a yellow powder, which is almost 100% lead).
- Only give children medicines prescribed for them by a licensed physician.

What should you do if you think you have been exposed to lead?

A blood test is available to measure the amount of lead in the blood and to estimate the amount of your recent exposure to lead. Blood tests are commonly used to screen children for lead poisoning. Your health care provider can draw the blood samples and send them to the appropriate laboratory for analysis.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends lead testing for children at 12 and 24 months of age. Children should be tested at ages 3-6 years if they have never been tested for lead. If the lead level is elevated, they should be tested yearly through 5 years of age.

Where can I get more information about lead?

www.cdc.gov

www.dshs.state.tx.us

www.hcphes.org

Source of Information: Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR)
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

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