

Protecting Your Child From Lead



A new [study](#) from Quest Diagnostics finds that **one in two** children tested in the U.S. has detectable lead in their body. The Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC) says no amount of lead in the body is safe.



What is lead and why is exposure dangerous?

Lead is a naturally occurring metal found throughout the earth. For decades, lead was used to make paint, gasoline, water pipes, building materials and consumer products. By the mid-20th century, scientists proved lead poisoning could cause devastating neurological impairments in children.

While regulations on lead paint, products and gasoline have reduced exposure rates, people can still be exposed. There's still no known safe level of lead exposure. Even at low levels, **lead exposure can impair brain and neurologic development for children under 6 years** – especially executive brain function, attention and hyperactivity – sometimes causing irreversible damage. Very high levels of lead can damage the nervous system and organs, such as kidneys – and even be fatal. Lead can also create health risks for pregnant women, including miscarriage.

Is my family at risk?

Lead is often invisible, and poisoning can occur before irreversible damage occurs. Assess your family's risk of lead exposure with these five questions:



Old homes

1. Was my home built before 1978?

Homes and apartment buildings constructed before 1978 (when lead-based paints were banned) probably contain lead-based paint. When the paint peels and cracks, it makes lead dust – which children can then swallow or inhale.



Drinking water

2. Does my home have a lead service line for water?

Certain water pipes, faucets and plumbing fixtures may contain lead that leaks into drinking water. Ask your local water authority if you have a lead service line, and inquire about programs to assist with its removal.



Consumer products

3. Do my kids play with older toys and plastics?

Lead may be found in the paint on older toys and some plastic products, including jewelry and sippy cups. Make sure to thoroughly research products for children and check the [Consumer Product Safety Commission](#) website to stay updated on recent recalls.



Soil

4. Is the soil my children play in safe?

Deposits from leaded gasoline, exterior lead-based paint, industrial sources and even aviation gas (especially near airports) can contaminate the soil where children play. Test your soil for contaminants to make sure it's safe.



Jobs, hobbies and other activities

5. Am I unknowingly bringing lead home?

Some jobs and hobbies raise risk of lead exposure, including some construction and manufacturing jobs to pottery and stained-glass work. If you are working with lead, shower and change your clothes afterwards. Standard soap and water may not be enough to reduce lead residue from the skin, and special wipes may be needed.

How to protect your child from lead poisoning



Take a test and follow up on blood lead levels

Have your child tested for lead between 1 and 2 years of age. A lead blood test is the best way to determine if lead is in the body. In some states, blood lead tests are mandated. Check with your pediatrician.

To prevent irreversible symptoms, test early and follow up on high results.



Eat a healthy diet

Follow a diet that includes a variety of vegetables, fruits, whole grains, protein foods and dairy products. When there is nutritious food in the body, it may be more difficult for lead to be absorbed.



Identify and remove sources of contamination

Get your home checked for lead hazards including lead-based paint if built before 1978. Don't forget about your outdoor space. Have your soil tested for potential contamination.

Ask your local water authority if you have a lead service line. If that is the case, ask if there are any programs to assist with the removal of the service line.



Seek treatment, if appropriate

The first step in treating lead poisoning is to remove the source of contamination. For more severe cases, some children may require additional therapies.

What to do if you think your child has been exposed?

- Most children who are exposed to lead have no symptoms. The best way to tell if your child has been exposed is with a blood lead test.
- Your doctor can help you decide whether a blood lead test is needed and can also recommend appropriate follow-up actions if your child has been exposed.

Given no amount of lead exposure is safe for children, prevention is extremely important. This means limiting exposure and testing of young children for lead – and having them retested periodically if results indicate a potentially unsafe level.

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For more information on how to protect your child from lead exposure, go to www.cdc.gov/nceh/lead

