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## Childhood Lead Poisoning

### What is lead poisoning?

Lead is a toxic metal that produces many bad health effects. Lead poisoning is a preventable disease that affects children's health. Childhood lead poisoning occurs in all population groups and income brackets. There is no safe level of lead in the body.

### How can lead poisoning affect the body?

Lead poisoning can be difficult to recognize and can damage a child's central nervous system, brain, kidneys, and reproductive system. Even low levels of lead are related with decreased intelligence, behavior or learning disabilities, decreased tallness and growth, and hearing loss.

### How does lead enter the body?

Lead enters the body in the air we breath and through what we eat or drink. Children absorb about 50 percent of ingested lead into their blood stream while adults absorb only about 5 to 15 percent.

### Who is the most vulnerable to lead poisoning?

Unborn babies of pregnant women and children from newborn to six years old.

### What are the symptoms of lead poisoning?

Most children do not show symptoms. If they do, signs and symptoms may include headache, lack of appetite, vomiting, fatigue, anemia (low iron), stomachache, constipation, or seizures.

### What are some sources of lead I might find in or around my home?

For children, the greatest risk of exposure to lead is from swallowing lead paint chips or breathing in contaminated soil or dust. Lead-based paint can be

found in most homes built before 1978. Less common sources of exposure include household plumbing materials and water service lines. Non-glossy vinyl window blinds can create a lead dust hazard.

### What about lead in drinking water?

Lead in drinking water is not a common occurrence. Lead piping and water pipes with lead solder can be a source of lead poisoning, but in many cases, the sediment from the water coats the pipes and creates a barrier between the exposure source and the water itself. If you have lead pipes and your water has high lead levels, see your medical provider for a blood lead test and use filtered or alternative drinking water sources until the lead level has returned to recommended levels.

### How can I tell if my child may be exposed to lead?

If your child meets any of the criteria below, discuss testing with your medical provider: Does your child:

- Live in or regularly visit a house or apartment built before 1978?
- Interact with an adult whose job or hobby involves exposure to lead? (e.g., furniture refinishing, making stained glass, electronics, soldering, automotive repair, making fishing weights and lures, reloading shotgun shells and bullets, shooting in firing ranges, doing home repairs and remodeling, and making pottery)
- Eat dirt, paint, chips, or other non-food items?
- Have a brother or sister with a high blood lead level?
- Have iron deficiency, anemia, sickle cell disease, a developmental delay, or behavioral problems?
- Live near a lead smelter, battery plant or other lead industry?
- Use pottery, ceramic, or crystal ware for cooking, eating or drinking?



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## Childhood Lead Poisoning (continued)

### How can I minimize my child's exposure to lead?

- Cleaning dusty areas of the home with a wet cloth and warm soapy water. Keep windowsills and window blinds free from dust.
- If your home was built before 1978, test your home for lead before renovating or repairing.
- Wash children's hands after play, before eating, and before bed. Wash their toys, pacifiers, and other objects they put in their mouths.
- Use only lead-free ceramics for cooking or storing food. Pottery from foreign countries may contain lead.
- Feed your child three meals a day with foods high in calcium (milk, cheese, yogurt) and iron (lean meat, beans, eggs) and give them healthy snacks.
- Use only cold water from the cold water tap for cooking or for making baby formula.
- Keep your child away from peeling paint.
- Recycle spent rechargeable batteries.

### Can lead poisoning be detected and treated?

Yes. Early identification and treatment of lead poisoning reduces the risk of suffering permanent damage. A blood lead test is the only way to tell if a child has a high blood level.

### What are blood lead tests?

There are two types of blood lead tests; screening tests and confirmatory tests. Filter paper tests are used for screening purposes and require only a finger stick to complete. To confirm blood lead poisoning, a venous blood sample must be collected and tested.

### Where can I go to get tested?

Ask your health care provider about getting a blood lead test. Children should be tested at 12 months old and again at 24 months old or if there is a known exposure. The Sedgwick County Division of Health offers blood lead tests daily through the immunization clinic located at 2716 W. Central.

#### For More Information:

Contact the Sedgwick County  
Division of Health Epidemiology Program  
at 316-660-7300 or visit  
the Sedgwick County website at  
[www.sedgwickcounty.org](http://www.sedgwickcounty.org).

EPA Safe Drinking Water Hotline:  
1-800-426-4791

National Lead Information Center:  
1-800-424-LEAD  
[www.epa.gov/lead](http://www.epa.gov/lead)

NSF International:  
[www.nsf.org](http://www.nsf.org)