



## Adult Lead Poisoning

### What is lead poisoning?

Lead poisoning is a preventable disease that affects people's health. Lead is a toxic metal that produces many bad health effects. Lead affects the brain and vital organs and is especially harmful to children and to the adult reproductive system.

### How does lead enter the body?

Most human exposure to lead occurs through accidentally breathing or eating lead. Adults absorb about 5-15 percent of ingested lead into their blood stream, while children absorb about 50 percent.. Lead is more easily absorbed into growing bodies.

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

Unborn babies of pregnant women and children from newborn to six years old are more vulnerable to lead exposure than adults. Effects of lead exposure on children and adults cannot be corrected.

### What are the symptoms of lead poisoning?

Symptoms in adults include fatigue, headache, abdominal pain, memory loss, mood disorders, muscular weakness, joint pain, numbness or tingling of the extremities, reduced sperm count, abnormal sperm, miscarriage or premature birth in pregnant women.

### What are sources of lead that adults are exposed to?

Although home exposures do occur, most adult lead exposure is occupational and occurs in lead-related industries. Workers may inhale lead dust and lead oxide fumes, as well as eat, drink, and smoke in or near contaminated areas, thereby increasing their probability of lead ingestion.

### Common sources of lead exposure include the following:

#### 1. Occupational:

- Construction workers
- Contractors who renovate homes or buildings built before 1978
- Workers who sand, scrape or blast lead-based paints
- Bridge reconstruction workers
- Firing range instructors and cleaners
- Painters
- Foundry workers
- Scrap metal recyclers
- Auto repairers
- Cable splicers
- Lead smelters
- Manufacturers of bullets, ceramics, electronics, or jewelry

#### 2. Hobbies:

- Casting (making) bullets or fishing sinkers
- Home remodeling
- Target shooting at firing ranges
- Lead soldering
- Auto repair
- Stained glass making
- Glazed pottery making

#### 3. Substance Use:

- Some folk remedies used by Indian, Middle Eastern, West Asian, and Latino cultures
- Cosmetics like kohl and kajal
- Moonshine whiskey (made with automotive radiators used as condensers)
- Ceramicware (glazes and decorations can contain lead)



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## Adult Lead Poisoning (continued)

### What can I do to protect myself and my family when working with lead?

- Do not eat, drink or smoke in lead-contaminated work areas
- Wash your hands before eating, smoking, or touching your face after working with lead
- Wear protective equipment over your clothing whenever you work with lead
- Shower, wash your hair and change into clean clothes (including shoes) before leaving the workplace. "Take home lead" can contaminate your vehicle, home, and potentially harm your family, especially young children
- Store street clothes in a separate area from your work clothes
- Eating a well-balanced diet including iron-rich foods can help reduce lead levels

### 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.

### 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 person 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. The Sedgwick County Division of Health offers blood lead tests daily through the immunization clinic located at 2716 W. Central. Call 660-7300 for more information.

#### 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)