

What is Lead Poisoning?

Lead poisoning occurs when lead enters the bloodstream and builds up to toxic levels. Many different factors such as the source of exposure, length of exposure, and underlying susceptibility (e.g., child's age, nutritional status, and genetics) affect how the body handles foreign substances.

No safe blood lead level in children has been identified. Here are important facts to know about lead exposure and its potentially harmful effects.

- **Lead is a toxic element, especially in young children.** When absorbed into the body, it can result in damage to the brain and nervous system, learning and behavior problems, slow growth and development, and hearing and speech problems.
- **Lead poisoning is preventable!** The key is preventing children from coming into contact with lead.
- **Lead can be found inside and outside the home.** The most common source of exposure is from lead-based paint, which was used in many homes built before 1978. Children can be exposed by swallowing or breathing in lead dust created by old paint that has cracked and chipped, eating paint chips, or chewing on surfaces coated with lead-based paint, such as window sills.
 - There are simple steps that can be taken to protect family members from lead-based paint hazards in the home, such as regularly cleaning the home, washing children's hands and toys often, and wiping shoes before entering the home.
 - If you live in a house built before 1978, a certified inspector or risk assessor can be hired to check your home for lead-based paint or lead-based paint hazards.
 - Lead can also be found in drinking water. The most common sources of lead in drinking water are lead pipes, faucets, and fixtures.
- **Other examples of possible sources of lead include** some metal toys or toys painted with lead-based paint, furniture painted with lead-based paint, some metal-containing jewelry, some imported items (i.e., health remedies, foods and candies, cosmetics, powders or make-up used in religious ceremonies), and lead-glazed pottery or porcelain.

- **Children can become exposed to lead by:**
 - Putting their hands or other lead-contaminated objects in their mouths;
 - Ingesting lead-contaminated dust;
 - Eating paint chips found in homes from peeling or flaking lead-based paint;
 - Drinking water that comes from lead pipes;
 - Playing in lead-contaminated soil;
 - Eating food made with lead-containing imported spices or candies; and
 - Using ceremonial make-up or powders that contain lead.
- **Some children are at greater risk for lead exposure than others**, including those who are:
 - From low-income families;
 - Living with adults whose jobs or hobbies involve working with lead;
 - Members of racial-ethnic minority groups;
 - Recent immigrants; and
 - Living in older, poorly maintained rentals properties.
- **Adults may also unknowingly bring lead dust into their home** from their jobs or hobbies.
- **During pregnancy, women may crave nonfood items (pica) that may contain lead**, such as soil, clay, or crushed pottery.

By the numbers



About 3.6 million American households have children under 6 years of age who live in homes with lead exposure hazards.

According to the CDC, about 500,000 American children between the ages of 1 and 5 years have blood lead levels at or above the CDC blood lead reference value (the level at which CDC recommends public health actions begin).

Get the Facts on Lead

- **Many homes built before 1978 have lead-based paint.** Lead from paint, paint chips, and dust can pose serious health hazards particularly to children and pregnant women.
- **Adults and children can get lead into their bodies by:**
 - Breathing in lead dust (especially during activities such as renovations, repairs, or painting);
 - Swallowing lead dust that settles in food, food preparation surfaces, floors, window sills, and other places; or
 - Eating paint chips or soil that contains lead.
- **The most common sources of lead in drinking water** are lead pipes, faucets, and fixtures.
- **Other sources of lead include** some metal toys, wooden toys or furniture painted with lead-based paint, some metal-containing jewelry, and lead-glazed pottery or porcelain, some candies, spices or make-up.
- Lead may also be brought into the home on work clothes, shoes, and hair.



Get Your Home Tested

If your home was built before 1978, you can get it tested for lead-based paint by:

- A **lead-based paint inspection** that tells you if your home has lead-based paint and where it is located.
- A **lead risk assessment** that tells you if your home currently has any lead hazards from paint, dust, or soil, and where they are located.
- A **combination inspection and risk assessment** that tells you if your home has any lead-based paint or lead-based paint hazards and where they are located.

Contact your local health department or water company to find out about testing your water.



Get Your Child Tested



- **Act early to get your child tested for lead.**
 - Children's blood lead levels tend to increase from 6 to 12 months of age and peak at 18 to 24 months of age.
- **A simple blood test can detect lead.**
 - Ask your child's healthcare provider to perform blood lead testing for your child at 12 and 24 months old and between 3 and 6 years old if not previously tested.
- **Blood lead tests are recommended for:**
 - Children at ages 12 and 24 months, especially those who receive Medicaid
 - Children between ages 3 and 6 years who have not been previously tested
 - Children or other family members who have been exposed to high levels of lead
- **Ask your child's healthcare provider to explain the blood lead test results.**

Contact the Alabama Department of Public Health for Additional Information

- **The Alabama Lead Contractors Certification Program** provides environmental services related to lead poisoning prevention and consists of the Lead Hazard Reduction Contractor Certification (Abatement) and the Alabama Lead Renovation Contractor Certification. (1-800-819-7644)
- **The Alabama Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Program** provides outreach and education and case management services to address the health concerns of lead poisoning and supports families in providing a lead safe environment for their children. (1-833-667-1495)