



### ***What is lead?***

Lead is a soft, dense metal used to make many products. It may be found in fishing weights, bullets, ceramic dishes, glassware, car batteries, electronics, and old plumbing, among other things. Years ago, it was added to gasoline and to paint. (Lead was banned from gasoline in 1995 and from paint in 1978.) Lead is *toxic*, or poisonous, to people if it gets inside the body.

### ***How does lead make children sick?***

Lead can damage many organs, especially the nervous system, brain, and kidneys. It can interfere with normal brain development, causing reduced IQ, learning disabilities, behavior problems, and hearing problems. *This damage is permanent.* At very high levels lead can cause seizures, coma, and even death.



The primary source of lead poisoning in children is flaking, dusting lead paint in millions of homes built before 1978.

### ***What causes lead poisoning?***

The biggest source of childhood lead poisoning is paint in homes built before 1978 (before lead paint was banned). As the paint ages, it may chip and peel, or form invisible *lead dust*. Lead dust can also form when painted surfaces are rubbed together, scraped, or sanded, like in a window frame or while a home is being renovated. The dust settles on places where babies and young children crawl and play. They swallow lead when they put dust-covered surfaces, like their hands and toys, in their mouths. They may also eat visible chips of paint.

### ***Is my child at risk?***

Lead poisoning can affect any child, but children under age 3 are at the greatest risk because:

- Children under age 3 normally put their hands and other objects in their mouths.
- Children under age 3 are growing so fast, any lead that gets into their bodies is absorbed very easily.

### ***Are there other sources of lead poisoning?***

Below is a list of items that may contain lead. These items could cause lead poisoning if swallowed or if children put them in their mouths:

- Toy jewelry
- Fishing weights or lures
- Bullets, buckshot, and musket balls
- Imported or antique toys with painted surfaces
- Some Mexican candies
- Certain folk medicines or remedies, like *azarcon*, *pay-loo-ah*, or *ayurvedic* medicines
- Water from old plumbing
- Soil near a road or near a house painted with lead paint
- Vinyl mini-blinds made before 1997
- Handcrafted or foreign-made ceramic dishes may contain lead that can get into food or drink



Children under 3 years of age are at highest risk due to their hand-to-mouth activities.

Adults can bring invisible lead particles into a home if they have a job or a hobby that exposes them to lead. These include:

- House painting or renovation
- Furniture refinishing
- Stained glass
- Firearms
- Recycling or making automobile batteries



Children with lead poisoning usually don't look or feel sick.

### ***How do I know if my child has lead poisoning?***

Sometimes children with lead poisoning have stomach aches or irritability, but most of the time there are *no symptoms at all*. Your child's doctor can do a blood test. That is the only way to be sure whether or not there has been an exposure to lead. Children less than 6 years old, who are at risk for lead poisoning, should be tested even if they do not appear sick.

### ***Can I protect my child from lead?***

Lead poisoning is completely preventable! These steps can help keep your child safe from lead:

1. If you live in a building built before 1978, the paint may contain lead. Often the soil around the building also contains lead. Use lead-safe work practices if performing any renovations or maintenance and keep bare soil covered with mulch or vegetation.
2. Damp mop floors and surfaces like windowsills often to remove lead. Frequently wash your child's hands, toys, and pacifiers.
3. Discourage your child from playing in bare soil.
4. Feed your child a healthy, low fat diet with plenty of calcium and iron. Their bodies will be less likely to absorb lead.
5. Don't eat or drink from ceramic dishes that are hand crafted or not officially imported into the U.S.
6. Avoid using folk or ayurvedic medicines.
7. Stay alert to recalls of toys or products that may contain harmful amounts of lead. The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) keeps a list on their website: [www.cpsc.gov](http://www.cpsc.gov). The list is updated often.
8. Don't allow a child younger than 6 to wear or play with imported toy jewelry.
9. If you have a job or hobby that uses lead, take steps to keep the lead from entering your house, such as showering before coming home.



Foods high in calcium and iron, like milk, lean meats, greens, beans, and eggs will help protect your child from lead.



### ***Who can help me if I have questions or concerns?***

For concerns about someone who may have been exposed to lead, contact your doctor, or your regional poison center: 1-800-222-1222.

For more information visit the Lead-Safe Virginia website: <http://www.vdh.virginia.gov/leadsafe/>