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DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH SERVICES
PUBLIC HEALTH
PASSAIC COUNTY, N.J.

Childhood Lead Safety



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Introduction

Lead is a naturally occurring metal known to cause many health issues. Children can ingest lead by putting items such as toys and dirt in their mouths. Due to their hand-to-mouth behavior, kids under 6 years old are more likely to be exposed to lead.

Lead in the Blood

There is no safe blood lead level (BLL), meaning that even low levels of lead in the blood can impact a child's growth, learning, and development – and the effects of lead poisoning can be permanent.



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Lead Sources in Your Home

Children can be exposed to lead where they live, play, and learn. Lead exposure happens when a child touches, swallows, or breathes in lead or lead dust.

Sources of lead can include:



Chipping or peeling paint in houses built before 1978: When paint cracks and peels, it creates lead paint chips and dust that children may eat or breathe in.



Water from lead pipes: Some water pipes, plumbing fixtures, and faucets can contain lead that contaminates drinking water.



Soil near airports, highways, or factories: Lead particles from exterior lead-based paint, gasoline, and lead industries can get into the surrounding soil and last for years. Children may inhale or eat contaminated soil, or it can be brought inside on shoes and play clothes.



Imported foods; traditional medicines or remedies: Some candies, wrappers, spices, cosmetics, and ceremonial powders brought in from outside the U.S. can contain lead.



Some imported toys and jewelry: Lead is found in some imported toys, antiques, jewelry, and collectible trinkets.



Certain jobs and hobbies: Certain professions and hobbies (e.g., stained glass making) can involve using lead-based products that can be brought into the home by a parent or caregiver.

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Symptoms of Lead Poisoning

It can be difficult to know if your children have been exposed to lead; most children don't show obvious symptoms right away unless the blood lead levels have become extremely high. Many cases of childhood lead poisoning go undiagnosed and untreated. However, some symptoms of lead poisoning include the following:



Headaches



Stomachaches; nausea



Tiredness



Irritability

Once a child ingests lead, it can quickly enter their blood and cause harm. When exposure to lead stops, the amount of lead in the blood starts to gradually decrease.

A child's body will release some of the lead through sweat, urine, and feces, but lead is also stored in bone. The amount of lead in bones may take years to decrease.

QuickNote
How your child's body handles lead exposure depends on many factors, including their age, nutrition, existing health conditions, the source of lead exposure, and the length of time they were exposed.

TAB 2

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Complications

Lead exposure has been associated with:



Damage to the brain and nervous systems.



Damage to the reproductive system.



Slowed growth and development.



Decreased attention span.



Poor academic performance.



Lower IQ.



Hearing and speech problems.



Learning and behavior problems.



Serious illness and death.

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Prevention

There are many steps you can take to keep your family safe from lead exposure.

Safeguard Your Home

Get your home inspected. If your home was built before 1978, have it checked by a licensed inspector. If you rent, ask your landlord to have it inspected and to share the results with you. To find a certified inspector, visit: **www.epa.gov/lead**

Test your drinking water. Contact your water provider to check if there are lead service lines connected to your home.

Use caution when renovating. Home repairs, such as sanding or scraping paint, can produce dust. Use only approved methods for removing lead hazards and use Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)-certified contractors.

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Check Products for Lead

- **Avoid certain toys for children.** Some imported toys, antique toys, and toy jewelry can contain lead.
- **Practice safety in the kitchen.** Some types of ceramic and pottery dishware may be glazed with lead. This could contaminate foods prepared, served, or stored in these dishes.
- **Use caution with certain foods.** Some imported candies, spices, and other foods can come from unregulated sources.

Take Steps to Stay Healthy

- **Serve children nutritious foods.** A balanced diet high in iron (protects from harmful effects of lead), calcium (makes it hard for lead to enter the body), and vitamin C (aids in absorption of iron and calcium) help keep lead out of the body.
- **Wash toys and hands.** Ensure your child washes their hands regularly, especially after playing outside or with pets (they might have lead particles from soil on their fur or paws). Wash toys regularly as these could become contaminated from lead in household dust or soil.
- **Remove shoes before entering the house.** Taking off outdoor shoes can help prevent spreading lead-contaminated dust in the home.
- **Use caution when working with lead.** If a household member works with lead for a profession or hobby, have them change clothes before coming home. Keep all activity items (shoes, tools, etc.) outside and wash their clothes separately from the rest of the family's clothing.

Test Your Children

If you suspect lead exposure, talk to your health care provider. Based on blood test results, they can recommend treatment options and follow-up care.

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Testing Your Child

If you think your child has been exposed to lead, talk to your health care provider about getting a blood test for your child to check their blood lead level (BLL). A blood test is the only way to know for sure if your child has been exposed to lead.

QuickNote
Your health care provider may use a capillary blood sample (taken from your child's finger or heel) or a venous sample (from a vein in the arm) to check for the presence of lead in the blood.

Who should be screened?

All children who are at risk of lead exposure should be tested for lead poisoning. At-risk children may include those who:

- Spend time or live in a building built before 1978.
- Are refugees, immigrants, or were recently adopted from less developed countries.
- Come from low-income households.
- Spend time or live with someone who works with lead or has hobbies that expose them to lead.



QuickNote
New Jersey mandates that children under age 6 be tested for lead at ages 1 and 2, or as soon as possible before turning 6 years old.

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Does my child need testing?

1. Does your child live in or frequently visit a building built before 1978 that has the potential for lead exposure?	◯ Yes ◯ No ◯ Unsure
2. In the past year, has your child spent any time outside the U.S.?	◯ Yes ◯ No ◯ Unsure
3. Does your child play or live with another child that has an elevated BLL?	◯ Yes ◯ No ◯ Unsure
4. Does your child have developmental delays or disabilities, put non-food items in their mouth, or pick at/touch painted surfaces?	◯ Yes ◯ No ◯ Unsure
5. Does your child have regular contact with someone who might bring home traces of lead from work or a hobby?	◯ Yes ◯ No ◯ Unsure
6. Does your household use traditional medicines, powders, cosmetics, spices, or food from other countries?	◯ Yes ◯ No ◯ Unsure
7. Does your family cook, serve, or store food in pottery, crystal, or pewter that was made in other countries?	◯ Yes ◯ No ◯ Unsure

If you answered "yes" or "unsure" to any of these questions, your child might need a blood test to check for an elevated BLL.

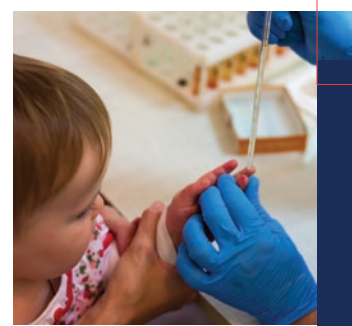
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Test Results

A venous confirmatory blood lead test is to be obtained whenever a capillary blood lead screening sample result is 3.5 micrograms per deciliter (µg/dL) or greater. For a venous blood lead test result of 3.5 µg/dL or greater, repeat testing per the appropriate time frame and monitor until the venous blood lead test result is **below** 3.5 µg/dL. Written education on blood lead hazard reduction should be provided to all those who have children with BLLs between 3.5 µg/dL and 4.9 µg/dL.



Venous Test Result (µg/dL)	Test Again
<3.5	N/A
3.5-9	Repeat venous blood lead testing every 1 to 4 months.
10-19	Repeat venous blood lead testing in 1 to 3 months.
20-44	Repeat venous blood lead testing in 1 week to 1 month.
45 or greater	Repeat venous blood lead testing as soon as possible. ***An evaluation to be completed for hospitalization and chelation per medical guidelines.**

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Resources

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)
Learn more about the effects of lead poisoning, prevention, and testing.
www.cdc.gov/lead-prevention

Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)
Find basic information and important steps you can take if your drinking water tests positive for lead.
www.epa.gov/ground-water-and-drinking-water/basic-information-about-lead-drinking-water

HealthyChildren.org
This website offers general information on protecting your family from lead, as well as frequently asked questions for parents and those who are pregnant or breastfeeding.
www.healthychildren.org/English/safety-prevention/all-around/Pages/Lead-Screening-for-Children.aspx

U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission
Access lists of product recalls and report unsafe products.
www.cpsc.gov/Recalls



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Even low levels of lead in the blood can impact a child's growth, learning, and development – and the effects of lead poisoning can be permanent. Learn more about lead poisoning and how to protect young family members where they live, learn, and play.

- Common sources of lead
- Effects of lead exposure
- Testing and prevention



Photos used for illustrative purposes only; the people shown are not linked to the topic.

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