



Lead Levels in Children

How are children exposed to lead?

Chipping or peeling paint in old homes is the biggest culprit for childhood lead exposure. **If your home was built before 1978, the paint may have lead in it. Fading or worn-down paint can create dust that contains lead**, especially in areas around windowsills and doorframes. Little ones known for picking up toys and putting them into their mouths are especially at risk for lead exposure this way. Exterior paint in homes may also land on the soil kids play on in their yards. **Lead is also found in water, with older homes most likely to have lead pipes and fixtures.** Even newer “lead-free” plumbing may contain as much as 8 percent lead. Old toys and furniture may also have lead-based paint.

What are the symptoms of lead poisoning?

There are **often no clear symptoms of lead poisoning.** However, some children may have:

- Stomach pain
- Constipation
- Headaches
- Irritability

Why is lead poisoning harmful for children?

Children’s developing brains and nervous systems are more likely to be affected by toxins (poisonous materials). Even small amounts of lead exposure add up over time, increasing risk of developmental effects.

Should my child get a blood test to check for lead?

Your pediatrician should ask questions about your home environment to identify if your child is at risk of lead poisoning. Some concerning home

environments, include:

- Homes built before 1978
- An older home being remodeled
- Walls, windowsills or furniture in the home with chipping or peeling paint
- Low income communities that may have older homes in poor repair
- Industrial cities

Other factors increasing the risk for lead poisoning include:

- Storing food in pottery made with lead-based paint
- Working with lead

If your child has a risk for exposure or you are concerned, your child should get a blood test to check for lead.

What is a safe lead level?

There is **no safe lead level**. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), 5 micrograms per deciliter of lead in blood is the “blood lead level of concern.”

What is the treatment for lead poisoning?

Removing a child’s exposure to lead will help stop the progression of effects. We don’t have medicine that reverses the harm that has already occurred. A chemical process called **chelation therapy** helps remove heavy metals like lead from the blood, but has serious side effects that could potentially be life-threatening. We only use chelation for very high blood lead levels. Therefore, **prevention is key.**

What can be done to prevent exposure to lead?

If you live in a home built before 1978:

- Talk to your state or local health department about testing paint and dust from your home
 - The Environmental Protection Agency has a website that explains the process of having your house inspected for lead and a tool to

find a qualified inspector near you:

<http://www.epa.gov/lead/understanding-inspection-risk-assessment-and-abatement>

- Make sure your child does not have access to peeling paint
- Regularly wash children's hands and toys, which can be contaminated from house dust or exterior soil (known lead sources)

How do I know if my home water supply contains lead?

You cannot see, taste, or smell lead in water. Start with your local water supplier. According to the Centers for Disease Control, you should **call your water supplier** and ask: **Does the service pipe at my street (header pipe) have lead in it?**

- If you are concerned, some local water suppliers will come to your home and test for free. If that's not an option, you can buy a lead testing kit from home improvement stores to collect the testing samples.
 - If you do testing yourself, be sure to follow directions carefully and only use "first-draw water," the very first water coming out of your pipes after sitting overnight. If there are harmful materials in the pipes, that water will have the most accumulation of toxins.
 - You'll send the samples off to a laboratory for analysis. The EPA says the most reliable testing is via a state-certified lab, such as those listed on the EPA's web site:
<http://www.epa.gov/dwlabcert/contact-information-certification-programs-and-certified-laboratories-drinking-water>

Free Resources for Flint Area Residents

Free bottled water, water filters, replacements and water testing kits are available at several locations around the city. To locate a location near you access:

<http://www.michigan.gov/flintwater>

and click on: **Get Clean Water**. This site has information about testing water and using water filters.

Additional resources:

- **Michigan Department of Community Health**
http://www.michigan.gov/documents/CopingWithYourChildsDiagnosis_86203_7.pdf
- **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention**
http://www.cdc.gov/nceh/lead/acclpp/lead_levels_in_children_fact_sheet.pdf
- **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention**
<http://www.cdc.gov/nceh/lead/tools/5things.pdf>

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