

Prevent Children's Exposure to Lead

Lead poisoning can be prevented. The key is to keep children from coming in contact with lead. If children are lead poisoned they must be treated.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) shares some great information on preventing exposure. Lead hazards in a child's environment must be identified and controlled or removed safely. Lead is invisible to the naked eye and has no smell. No safe blood lead level in children has been identified.

Young children often put toys, fingers, and other objects in their mouth as part of their normal development. This may put them in contact with lead paint or dust.

One common way children can be exposed to lead are through contact with chips and particles of old lead paint. Children can be directly exposed to lead from paint if they swallow paint chips. But exposure is more common from swallowing house dust or soil contaminated by leaded paint. This happens when lead paint chips get ground into tiny bits that become part of the dust and soil in and around homes. In addition, lead can be scattered when paint is disturbed during destruction, remodeling, paint removal, or preparation of painted surfaces for repainting.

Exposure to lead can seriously harm a child's health, including damage to the brain and nervous system, slowed growth and development, learning and behavior problems, and hearing and speech problems.

Lead paint or dust are not the only ways children can come in contact with lead. These sources may include: imported candies, imported toys and toy jewelry, imported cosmetics, pottery and ceramics. Other sources include drinking water contaminated by lead leaching from lead pipes, solder, brass fixtures, or valves and consumer products, including tea kettles and vinyl mini-blinds.

A variety of work and hobby activities expose adults to lead, including using an indoor firing range, making home repairs, remodeling a home, and making pottery. When adults whose jobs expose them to lead wear their work clothes home or wash them with the family laundry, their families can be exposed to lead. Families can also be exposed when adults bring scrap or waste material home from work.

If you think your child has been in contact with lead, contact your child's health care provider. He or she can help you decide whether to test your child's blood to see if it has high levels of lead.

A blood lead test is the only way to find out if your child has a high lead level. Most children with high levels of lead in their blood have no symptoms. Your child's health care provider can recommend treatment if your child has been exposed to lead.