



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 childhood lead poisoning 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 repeatedly 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 chips of peeling paint.

Is my child at risk?

Lead poisoning can affect any child, but children under age 6 living in a home built before 1978, or living in poverty, are at the greatest risk. A blood test is the only way to know for certain if your child is being exposed to lead. Talk to your health care provider. Most insurance companies, Medicaid, and FAMIS cover the cost of lead tests.

Are there other sources of lead poisoning?

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

- Metal trinkets or jewelry, particularly if made outside of the U.S.
- Fishing weights or lures
- Bullets, buckshot, and musket balls
- Some toys, particularly if made outside the U.S.
- Some Mexican candies
- Certain folk medicines or remedies, like *azarcon*, *Nzu*, *pay-loo-ah*, or *ayurvedic* medicines.
- Handcrafted or foreign-made ceramic dishes may contain lead that can get into food or drink.



Children at risk for lead poisoning should be tested at ages 1 and 2. Ask your health care provider.

Adults can bring invisible lead 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. Young children enrolled in Medicaid can get free tests. Children 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 home built before 1978, talk to your local health department or Lead Safe Virginia before any renovation projects.
2. Damp mop floors and surfaces like windowsills often to remove lead. Frequently wash your child's hands, toys, and pacifiers.
3. Feed your child a healthy, low fat diet with plenty of calcium and iron. Their bodies will be less likely to absorb lead.
4. At this time, children and pregnant women should avoid candy from Mexico.
5. Avoid using ceramic dishes purchased outside of the U.S. for food and drink.
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. 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, your local health department, or your regional poison center: **1-800-222-1222**.

For information about working safely with lead paint, how to have your home tested for lead, or for more information on having a lead safe home, contact Lead-Safe Virginia: 1-877-668-7987. Visit their website: www.vahealth.org/leadsafe/