

Get Ahead of Lead Factsheet

New York State Department of Health

Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Program

Lead poisons people. It is especially bad for children.

If lead gets into a child's body, it could cause:

- a lower IQ
- behavior problems
- growth problems
- anemia
- kidney damage
- hearing loss

Lead can be found in old paint, dust, soil and water. Some Asian and Hispanic folk medicines for stomach upset also have lead. Lead can also be found in cosmetics imported from the Middle East.

How is lead tested?

- A small amount of blood is taken from a finger prick or vein and tested for lead. Blood can be drawn at a doctor's office, hospital, clinic or lab. If you don't know where to bring your child for testing, call your local health department.

What causes lead poisoning in children?

- The most common cause is dust from old lead-based paint. If floors have dust from old painted walls, or paint chips, a baby could suck on lead-dusted hands or toys or breathe in lead dust. Some toddlers eat paint chips, soil, or chew on lead-painted window sills and stair rails.

There are steps parents can take to prevent children from lead poisoning.

- Keep children away from peeling paint and broken plaster.
- Wash their hands often, to rinse off any lead dust or dirt.
- Wash your child's toys often, especially teething toys.
- Use cold water - not hot - for infant formula or cooking. Let the cold water tap run for at least a minute before using to flush lead picked up from pipes.
- Store food from open cans in glass or plastic containers.
- Use lead-free dishes. Some dishes may have lead in their glazes. Don't use chipped or cracked dishes to store or serve food.
- Be careful with hobbies. Some crafts call for use of paints, glazes and solder. Many of these may contain lead.
- Don't bring lead home with you from work. People who work at construction, plumbing, painting, auto repair and certain other jobs can be exposed to lead.
- Wash work clothes separately.
- Keep children away from remodeling and renovation sites. Old paint can have lead in it.
- Avoid having children play in soil especially around the foundations of older buildings and near roadways. Use a sandbox instead.
- When windows are open in warm weather, wash the sills and window wells any time you see dust, but at least once a month.
- Call your local health department for information about professionals who handle lead-based paint problems.

Feed your family foods that get ahead of lead.

- Foods high in iron and calcium can help prevent lead poisoning.
For Iron - dried beans/peas, lean beef/pork, chicken/turkey, spinach, whole grain/fortified breads, eggs, tuna and collard greens
For Calcium - cheese, milk, yogurt, cottage cheese, ice cream, milkshakes, pudding, cream soups, pizza, lasagna, macaroni and cheese
- Feed children healthy snacks: a child with an empty stomach will absorb more lead.

At well-child visits at ages 1 and 2, your health care provider should collect a blood specimen to check for screening for elevated blood lead levels, regardless of your answers to the risk assessment questions. Children between 9 and 36 months of age are at increased risk of the effects of lead.

At each routine well-child visit, your health care provider should assess children 6 months to 72 months of age for risk of high dose lead exposure. A blood specimen should be collected from those children found to be at high risk.

Risk Assessment Questions

1. Does your child live in or regularly visit a house/building built before 1978 with peeling or chipping paint, or with recent, ongoing or planned renovation or remodeling?

Note: This could include a day care center, preschool, and the home of a babysitter or a relative.

Yes No Unknown

2. Has your family/child ever lived outside the United States or recently arrived from a foreign country?

Yes No Unknown

3. Does your child have a brother, sister, housemate or playmate being followed or treated for lead poisoning?

Yes No Unknown

4. Does your child frequently put things in his/her mouth such as toys, jewelry, or keys? Does your child eat non-food items (pica)?

Note: This may include toys or jewelry products that have been specifically recalled by the Consumer Products Safety Commission (CPSC) due to identification of unsafe levels of lead.

Yes No Unknown

5. Does your child frequently come in contact with an adult whose job or hobby involves exposure to lead?

Note: Jobs such as house painting, renovations, construction, welding or pottery making. Hobby examples are making stained glass or pottery, fishing, making firearms and collecting lead figurines.

Yes No Unknown

6. Does your child live near an active lead smelter, battery recycling plant, or another industry likely to release lead or does your child live near a heavily traveled major highway where soil and dust may be contaminated with lead?

Note: May need to alert parent/caregiver if such an industry is local. Ask any additional questions that may be specific to situations in a particular community.

Yes No Unknown

Your health care provider may ask additional questions that may be specific to situations which exist in your particular community. If your family and/or child has recently arrived from a foreign country or visited developing or underdeveloped countries for substantial periods of time, you should tell your health care provider.

If the answer to any of the above questions is **YES**, then the child is considered to be at risk of high dose lead exposure and should be screened with a blood lead test. If you are unsure about any of these questions, discuss them further with your health care provider.

If you have any questions about the information presented here, discuss them with your health care provider, or you may call your local childhood lead poisoning prevention program at your local health department.