



Protect Your Child from Lead Poisoning

It is very important to check young children for lead poisoning. This is an issue important to families of all incomes and locations. Lead can be found in paint made before 1978 and water pipes produced before 1986. Soil may have lead from house paints or past use of lead gasoline in cars. Young children can swallow lead from paint dust or soil when they put their hand or other things in their mouths.

Children younger than 3 years are more easily hurt by lead because of their rapidly developing brains and bodies. High lead levels can cause problems with learning and behavior such as attention deficit disorder. It can also cause damage to the kidneys, to the nervous system, and to hearing.

The signs of lead poisoning are not easy to see and seem like many other common illnesses. Early symptoms in children include loss of appetite, weight loss, difficulty sleeping, poor attention span, and irritability. Often there are no noticeable symptoms. The only way to tell if children have lead poisoning is by a blood-lead test.

Good habits that can decrease the risk of lead poisoning include:

- Children should eat three meals a day. Less lead is absorbed when children have food in their systems.
- Children's diets should contain foods rich in iron and calcium like milk, cheese, fish, and peanut butter. The body cannot tell the difference between calcium and lead. When the body's calcium levels are low, more lead will be absorbed.
- Limit fried and fatty foods in children's diets. Fats let lead be absorbed faster.
- Use cold water for cooking or drinking. Warm or hot water can cause lead to leach from pipes into the water.
- Do not store food or liquids in lead crystal glassware, imported pottery, or old pottery.
- Teach children to wash their hands before they eat, after playing outside, and before going to sleep. Adults should wash small children's hands until they are old enough to wash their own.
- Wash your hands before cooking food.
- Keep your home clean. Wash hard-surface floors, baseboards, and windowsills once a week.
- Wash children's toys, pacifiers, and bottles frequently. Do not forget to clean stuffed animals that can also carry lead dust.

Remember that there are often no symptoms of lead poisoning. **All Medicaid children should have a blood lead test at 12 months and 24 months of age.** Children 3-6 years of age should have a lead test if they have never been tested before. The only way to tell if someone has lead poisoning is with a blood lead test.

Call your primary care provider or local health department to get a blood-lead test.

Source: *Lead in Your Home: A Parent's Reference Guide*, United States Environmental Protection Agency, May 1999