

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 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 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

Adults can bring invisible lead particles into a home if they have a job or a hobby that exposes them to lead. These include:

- x House painting or renovation
- x Furniture refinishing
- x Stained glass
- x Firearms
- x Recycling or making automobile batteries

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. Children less than 6 years old, who are at risk for lead poisoning, should be tested even if they do not appear sick.

Can I protect my child from lead?

1. If you live in a building built before 1978, the paint may contain lead. Often the soil around the building also contains lead. Use lead-safe work practices if performing any renovations or maintenance and keep bare soil covered with mulch or vegetation.
2. Damp mop floors and surfaces like windowsills often to remove lead. Frequently wash your child's hands, toys, and pacifiers.
3. Discourage your child from playing in bare soil.
4. Feed your child a healthy, low fat diet with plenty of calcium and iron. Their bodies will be less likely to absorb lead.
5. Don't eat or drink from ceramic dishes that are hand crafted or not officially imported into the U.S.