



National Center for Healthy Housing

Understanding your child's blood lead level

Any exposure to lead is potentially harmful for a child as there is no known "safe" level. An advisory committee to CDC recently recommended revising the blood lead level at which health care providers respond to childhood lead exposure. The new guidance replaces the "level of concern" that was previously defined as 10 micrograms of lead per deciliter of blood. The Advisory Committee on Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention is recommending that CDC start using a reference value to initiate responses for children with blood lead levels that exceed those in 97.5% of all US children (currently five micrograms per deciliter of blood (ug/dL). Approximately 450,000 children in the U.S. have blood lead levels at this level or higher. The Committee also underscored the critical importance of minimizing lead exposures from the primary source - older housing with lead-based paint and contaminated soil and dust.

As a parent, you may wonder what this policy change means for you and your family. Here are the answers to some frequently asked questions:

Q: I was told that my child's blood lead level was "negative" the last time that I had him/her tested. Should I have him/her re-tested?

A: Ask your physician for the specific result of the last blood test. If the number was higher than 5 ug/dL, testing should be repeated to confirm. Having blood drawn from your child's vein is more accurate than a finger stick test. Make sure other children under 6 years of age, developmentally delayed children, and pregnant women get tested as well.

Q: What can I do to prevent my child's exposure to lead?

A: Take these steps to reduce your child's exposure to lead in your home/environment:

1. Keep your child away from painting and repair work that disturbs paint, and make sure no paint chips or dust remain in the work area before your child enters.
2. Pay attention to peeling paint: report it to your landlord if you're a tenant so that repairs will get made (and call code enforcement or legal aid if there's no response); and repair it safely if you're a homeowner.
3. Wash your child's hands, toys, bottles, pacifiers, and any other items your child often puts in his or her mouth.
4. Regularly clean floors, windowsills, and dusty places with wet mops or wet cloths to pick up any dust.
5. Use only cold tap water for making baby formula, drinking and cooking. Let the water run for a few minutes first.
6. Avoid using products from other countries such as: health remedies, eye cosmetics (i.e., kohl, kajal, surma), candies, spices, snack foods, clay pots and dishes, painted toys, and children's jewelry. These items may contain high levels of lead.
7. Remove shoes before entering your home.
8. Any household member who does construction work or other work that may involve lead should remove work clothes before entering; wash them separately.

Q: Who can I contact for more information?

A: Call 1-800-424-LEAD for more information about childhood lead poisoning and precautions for home renovation work. Contact the local health department if you are concerned that your child has been exposed.