

National Center for HEALTHY HOUSING



Childhood Lead Poisoning What You Should Know about Your Child's Blood Lead Test Result

What is childhood lead poisoning?

Childhood lead poisoning is caused by too much exposure to lead dust, lead paint, lead-contaminated soil and drinking water, and other sources. Lead poisoning can hurt a child's brain and nervous system and affect growth, development, school performance, and success in later life. Exposure to lead can affect almost every organ and system in a child's body. Children whose bodies have too much lead will have problems with learning and behaving well. They may be cranky or too active, and they may have trouble paying attention. These problems may not show up until a child is in school.

Where does lead come from?

Lead is a metal found in the earth. Lead was used in household paint (until 1978), in gasoline (until the early 1980s), and in some pipes for drinking water (until 1986). Children come into contact with lead in different ways. The most common sources of lead are paint in homes built before 1978 and the lead dust and soil that comes from the chipping, peeling, and flaking lead paint. Some other sources of lead include (but are not limited to) drinking water, certain commercial products, and dust that adults bring home from hobbies or jobs that use lead.

How do I know if my child is lead poisoned?

A blood test is the only routine way to find out whether your child is lead poisoned. Your healthcare provider may take blood from your child to test for lead. Blood lead testing is covered by Medicaid and many private insurers. You can also determine whether your child is at risk by getting your home inspected for lead-paint hazards and lead in water.

What do my child's test results mean?

No safe amount of lead has yet been found. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), most U.S. children ages 1 through 5 years have blood lead levels (BLLs) below 3.5 µg/dL (micrograms of lead per deciliter of blood). If your child has a BLL of 3.5 µg/dL or more or if your child is at risk, your family needs a plan to lower your child's exposure to lead. If you are planning to renovate or repaint your older home, be sure that the contractor is properly trained in lead-safe work practices.

Can my child be treated for lead poisoning?

Finding and removing the sources of lead is the most important way to prevent additional exposure and reduce levels in the blood. At very high levels (above 45 µg/dL), healthcare providers may treat children with medicine to help remove lead from their bodies. The medicine cannot reverse the injury to the brain caused by lead; however, it can reduce other serious and even life-threatening dangers of lead, such as coma and convulsions. The next section tells you how to make a plan to reduce your child's blood lead level.

You may need help to reduce your child's blood lead levels and prevent exposure.

Keep reading to learn how to:

- Work with your healthcare provider to follow up on your child's lead test.
- Seek help from other professionals to find the sources of lead and to fix the problems.

Make a Plan to Reduce Your Child's Blood Lead Level and Prevent It from Increasing

1. Work with your child's healthcare provider.

- Ask for the BLL of your child's blood lead test (for example, 2, 5, or 10 micrograms of lead per deciliter of blood). Keep a record so that you can show the test results to schools, WIC, or early intervention programs later and track changes over time.
- Ask whether your child needs more follow-up, such as more blood tests, nutrition services, or screening.
- Tell the healthcare provider about possible sources of lead in your child's environment; for example, peeling paint in your home or child care, recent painting or repairs, or work, hobbies, or consumer products that may involve lead.
- Be sure that all of your children younger than six years old are tested.
- Ask your healthcare provider for a list of local programs that help children with high blood lead levels.
- Contact your local Pediatric Environmental Health Specialty Unit for more information on lead poisoning and medical advice: <https://www.pehsu.net/findhelp.html>

2. Find and fix the sources of your child's lead exposure.

FIND: Paint that is in bad condition (peeling, flaking, chipping, or cracking), inside or outside your home, especially in places where your child spends time.

- FIX:**
- Put a temporary barrier over the area to keep it out of your children's reach. You can use metal, duct tape, or cardboard.
 - If you see paint chips or dust on windowsills or floors, clean these areas regularly with detergent and a damp rag or mop. Do not sweep paint chips. If you vacuum paint chips and dust be sure to use a vacuum equipped with a high-efficiency particulate air (HEPA) filter. For detailed cleaning directions, see https://www.hud.gov/sites/documents/DOC_11878.PDF.
 - Frequently wash your child's hands, toys, bottles, pacifiers, and other items that your child may put in his or her mouth.
 - If you are a tenant, tell your property manager and landlord about chipping and peeling paint. It is management's responsibility to fix the problem. Some information about funding for home repairs can be [found here](#). If you're worried about reporting the problem, you can contact Legal Aid at www.lsc.gov/find-legal-aid. If you reside in public housing, report issues to your local public housing agency.

FIND: A certified lead risk assessor to look for all the sources of lead in your home and help you decide which repairs need to be done.

- FIX:**
- Contact your local health or housing department to see if they offer lead risk assessments. For a list of risk assessors in your state, call the [National Lead Information Center](#) at 800-424-5323.

FIND: Bare soil (especially near homes built before 1928 or near a busy roadway, airport, or industrial source).

- FIX:**
- Test soil and cover with mulch, wood shavings, or grass.
 - Remove your shoes or wipe your feet carefully on a mat before you enter your home.

FIND: Items that may contain lead.

- FIX:**
- Avoid imported products that may have high levels of lead, such as health remedies, eye cosmetics (such as kohl, kajal, and surma), candies, spices, foods, clay pots and dishes, painted toys, and children's jewelry.
 - Read about other sources of lead. Visit <https://www.epa.gov/lead/protect-your-family-sources-lead>.
 - Find out about lead in consumer products. Visit www.saferproducts.gov.

FIND: Renovation, repair, or painting work in a home built before 1978.

- FIX:**
- Keep your child away from any repair work that disturbs paint. It can create a lot of lead dust.
 - If you hire a contractor to renovate, repair, or paint your home, hire someone who is certified in lead-safe work practices by EPA. See <https://cfpub.epa.gov/flipp/pub/index.cfm?do=main.firmSearch>.
 - If you need to fix lead paint hazards, hire a certified abatement professional. You can find a firm by calling the [National Lead Information Center](#) at 800-424-5323.
 - If you are working on your own home, learn how to work lead-safe. See <https://www.epa.gov/lead/renovation-repair-and-painting-program-do-it-yourselfers>.
 - If you come into contact with lead, take a shower and wash your hair before being around children.

FIND: Lead in drinking water.

- FIX:**
- You cannot see, taste, or smell lead in water. To find a certified laboratory to test your water, see <https://www.epa.gov/dwlabcert>.
 - To learn whether your pitcher or faucet filter device does a good job removing lead from your water, see www.nsf.org/Certified/DWTU/.
 - Use cold tap water for making baby formula, drinking, and cooking. Always run the cold water for a few minutes before using. Boiling water does not remove lead.
 - To learn more, call the [Safe Drinking Water Hotline for Lead](#) at 800-426-4791.

FIND: Work or hobbies that may involve lead.

- FIX:**
- Remove work clothes and shoes before entering the home. Wash these clothes separately from other family laundry.
 - Do hobby activities away from your home and away from children.