



Childhood Lead Poisoning

What You Should Know about Your Child's Blood Lead Test Results

What is childhood lead poisoning?

Childhood lead poisoning is a sickness caused by swallowing or breathing lead dust. Lead poisoning can hurt a child's brain and nervous system and slow down growth and development. Exposure to lead can affect almost every organ and system in a child's body. It is most harmful to a child's brain. Children whose bodies have too much lead may 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. 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 lead paint. Other sources of lead include: Drinking water, imported products, and dust that adults bring home from hobbies or from jobs that use lead.

How do I know if my child is lead poisoned?

A blood test is the only way to find out whether your child is lead poisoned. Your health care provider may take blood from your child's finger or arm to test for lead. Blood lead testing is covered by Medicaid and many private insurers.

What do my child's test results mean?

No safe amount of lead has been found in a child's blood. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), most U.S. children ages 1 through 5 years have blood lead levels below 5 µg/dL (micrograms of lead per deciliter of blood). If your child has a blood lead level of 5 or more, your family needs a plan to lower your child's exposure to lead.

Can my child be treated for lead poisoning?

At very high levels (above 45 µg/dL), health care providers may treat children with medicine to help remove lead from their bodies. The medicine can not reverse the injury to the brain caused by lead. It can reduce other serious and even life threatening dangers of lead, such as coma and convulsions. Finding and removing the sources of lead is the most important way to prevent additional exposure and reduce levels in the blood. 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. Keep reading to learn how to:

- Work with your health care 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



**National Center for
Healthy Housing**

www.nchh.org • 877-312-3046

Make a Plan to Reduce Your Child's Blood Lead Level

1) Work with your child's health care provider

- Ask for the blood lead level of your child's blood lead test** (for example, 2, 5, or 10 micrograms per deciliter). 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 health care provider about possible sources of the lead** in your child's environment, such as 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 under age 6 years are tested.**
- Ask your health care 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: www.pehsu.net

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

- 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 barrier over the area** to keep it out of your children's reach. You can use plastic, duct tape, cardboard, or heavy furniture.
- 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 or vacuum paint chips. For detailed cleaning directions, see <http://nmhealth.org/eheb/documents/Lead/HOW%20TO%20CLEAN.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 about chipping and peeling paint**. It is management's responsibility to fix the problem. If you are worried about reporting the problem, you can contact Legal Aid at www.lsc.gov/find-legal-aid

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**

- Fix:** **Cover bare soil 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:** www.epa.gov/lead/pubs/chancechecklist.pdf
- Find out about lead in consumer products:** 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: www.epa.gov/lead/pubs/renovation.htm
 - 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: www.epa.gov/lead/pubs/do-it-yourselfers.html
 - If you come into contact with lead, take a shower and wash your hair before being around any 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** <http://water.epa.gov/scitech/drinkingwater/labcert/statecertification.cfm>
- To learn whether your pitcher or faucet 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 Hot Line for Lead:** 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.**