

# Protect Your Kids



Lead paint poisoning affects over one million children today. Find out when your home, school and daycare center was built. If it was before 1978, it probably contains lead-based paint.

FACT 1: Just a few particles of dust from lead-based paint are enough to poison a child.

FACT 2: Lead from deteriorating paint can be found in soil around the home and in older playgrounds.

FACT 3: Since children often put their hands or toys in their mouths, washing their hands helps protect them from lead poisoning.

## Why children are at risk

Lead is poisonous because it interferes with some of the body's basic functions. Our bodies can't tell the difference between lead and calcium, which is a mineral that strengthens bones. Like calcium, lead remains in the bloodstream for a few weeks. Then it is absorbed into the bones, where it can collect for a lifetime.

- Children ages six and younger are especially at risk for three reasons:- their brains and nervous systems are still developing
  - at this age toys and fingers often end up in their mouths
  - their bodies are more likely to absorb lead than adults'
- The symptoms of lead poisoning are not easy to detect. Sometimes no symptoms occur, and sometimes the symptoms are the same as those of more common illnesses, such as the flu.
- Some of the early signs and symptoms of lead poisoning in children are:
  - Persistent tiredness or hyperactivity
  - Irritability
  - Loss of appetite
  - Weight loss
  - Reduced attention span
  - Difficulty sleeping
  - Constipation
- Find out if your child has elevated blood lead levels. Ask your pediatrician to do a simple blood test.

Even exposure to low levels of lead can cause:

- Damage to the brain and nervous system
- Behavior and learning problems, such as hyperactivity
- Slowed growth
- Hearing problems
- Headaches
- In rare cases of acute lead poisoning from ingestion of lead, children can suffer seizures, coma and even death.

## What to look for in your home

Lead-based paint is generally not a hazard if the painted surface is in good condition. Lead-based paint **is dangerous** if it is peeling, chipping, chalking or cracking. Paint chips and dust from lead-based paint can get on surfaces that children touch or crawl on. Just by placing their hands in their mouths, children can be exposed to the hazards of lead poisoning.

In an older home, common areas to check are:

- Windows and windowsills
- Doors and door frames
- Stairs, railings and banisters
- Floors, because some varnishes are known to contain lead

Dust containing lead can also be created by when painted surfaces rub together, such as when windows, doors or drawers are opened and closed, or by walking on stair treads.

- Check for dust buildup around hinges, window frames and painted drawers. Also be careful of generating dust when hammering, sanding or sawing.

Lead dust can also be tracked into the home from soil outside.

- Check the exterior of your home, including porches and fences, for flaking or deteriorating paint that may be lead-based.

Painted toys and furniture made before 1978 may be painted with lead-based paint. Do not let children chew on any cribs, playpens or older painted toys. Consider the condition of any furniture that you may be refinishing for your children's rooms.

More recently, imported toys have been recalled because of high levels of lead. Visit the Consumer Product Safety Commission site.

## What to look for where kids play and learn

If your child's school or day-care center was built before 1978, look around the inside and outside of the facility for lead hazards.

Make sure to look at:

- Interior painted areas. Look to see if the paint is cracking, chipping or peeling.
- Exterior painted areas. Check exterior paint as well; it can flake off and contaminate nearby soil where children may play.
- Surrounding areas. Be sure there are no large structures nearby with peeling or flaking paint that could contaminate the soil around play areas.

- Cleaning practices. Make sure the staff washes any pacifiers, toys or bottles that fall on the floor. Also, make sure that the staff has the children wash their hands thoroughly after playing outside and before eating or sleeping.
- Indoor play areas. Look to see if areas where children play are dust-free and clean.
- Playground equipment. Older equipment can contain lead-based paint.
- Check yards and playgrounds.
- Lead from deteriorating paint on the exterior of buildings and from current and past industrial and other sources (for example, lead in gasoline) can get into the soil in yards and playgrounds..
- Artificial turf and playground surfaces made from shredded rubber can contain lead.

## A checklist for parents

- Get your children tested by your pediatrician, even if they seem healthy.
- Find out whether your home, school or day care center was built before 1978. Older buildings are more likely to contain lead-based paint.
- If you rent, notify your landlord if you see any peeling or chipped paint.
- Keep your home clean and as dust-free as possible. Clean dust from floors, windowsills and other surfaces with a wet mop or sponge, warm water and a general all-purpose cleaner.
- Wash your children's hands before they eat, before they nap, when they come in from playing outside and at bedtime.
- Wash your children's bottles, pacifiers and toys often.
- Wipe soil off your family's shoes before they enter the house. Keep shoes at the door.
- Feed your children healthy, calcium-rich, low-fat foods.
- Hire a lead-safe-certified professional to paint or renovate your home, so you know that the work is done safely and thoroughly.
- Keep painted surfaces well-maintained.

[http://www.leadfreekids.org/my\\_kids/index.php](http://www.leadfreekids.org/my_kids/index.php)