

Lead poisoning

Why is lead harmful?

Lead can harm your blood, your bones & teeth, your muscles and how your brain works.

High lead levels can cause brain and kidney damage.

How do kids get lead poisoning?

Kids get lead poisoning from putting lead-containing objects in their mouths. The most common way is from lead-based paint which includes house paint from before 1980s.

Kids also can come into contact with lead through:

- soil or dust found near busy streets and around homes that were painted with lead-based paint
- water that flows through old lead pipes or taps
- food stored in bowls glazed or painted with lead, or tinned food from overseas
- some toys, jewellery, hobby, and sports objects (like stained glass, ink, paint, and plaster)
- some home remedies

How is lead poisoning treated?

The most important part of treatment is preventing more exposure to lead. Calcium, iron, and vitamin C are important parts of a healthy diet and also help to decrease the amount of lead the body absorbs.

Severe lead poisoning needs treatment in hospital.

What can I do?

If the house was built or repainted before 1980, assume that the paint is lead-based, unless a test shows that it is not.

- Paint shops, some pharmacies, and other suppliers sell lead-based paint testing kits. Some paint shops will also test paint flakes in store (often for free). Public health units will test paint flakes for free.

Wash dummies and toys frequently, especially those used outside.

With a normal healthy diet and avoidance of products that may contain lead, your blood lead level should decrease slowly. Your diet needs to include foods rich in calcium (e.g. dairy products), foods rich in iron (e.g. red meat) and extra sources of vitamin C (e.g. oranges, kiwifruit). These foods reduce the amount of lead that is taken up from your gut into your body.

You should also discuss this with your G.P. and or your local public health unit for further advice.

We recommend you have more blood tests in 3, 6, and 12 months to make sure your blood lead level is decreasing.

Compiled by Dr Aimee Neels, 16 August 2019