





KidsHealth
from the health experts of Nemours

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Belilovsky Pediatrics
Strongly Advises All Parents to Consult the Following Site:

<http://kidshealth.org>

For Accurate Information Regarding Nutrition, Exercise, Fitness, Parenting Skills as well as Many other Important Topics for your Newborn to Adolescent Child.

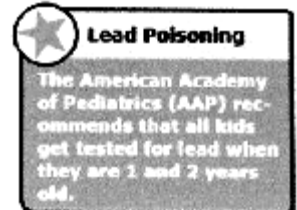
LEAD POISONING

If you have young kids, it's important to find out whether there's any risk that they might be exposed to lead, especially if you live in an older home.

Long-term exposure to lead, a naturally occurring metal used in everything from construction materials to batteries, can cause serious health problems, particularly in young kids. Lead is toxic to everyone, but unborn babies and young children are at greatest risk for health problems from lead poisoning — their smaller, growing bodies make them more susceptible to absorbing and retaining lead.

Each year in the United States 310,000 1- to 5-year-old kids are found to have unsafe levels of lead in their blood, which can lead to a wide range of symptoms, from headaches and stomach pain to behavioral problems and anemia. Lead can also affect a child's developing brain.

The good news is that you can protect your family from lead poisoning. If you have kids between 6 months and 3 years of age, talk to your doctor about potential lead sources in your house or anywhere they spend long periods of time. And it's important for kids to get tested for lead exposure at age 1 and again at age 2, as many with lead poisoning don't show any symptoms.



Why Is Lead Harmful?

When the body is exposed to lead — by being inhaled, swallowed, or in a small number of cases, absorbed through the skin — it can act as a poison. Exposure to high levels of lead in a short period of time is called acute toxicity. Exposure to small amounts of lead over a long period of time is called chronic toxicity.

Lead is particularly dangerous because once it gets into a person's system, it is distributed throughout the body just like helpful minerals such as iron, calcium, and zinc. And lead can cause harm wherever it lands in the body. In the bloodstream, for example, it can damage red blood cells and limit their ability to carry oxygen to the organs and tissues that need it.

Most lead ends up in the bone, where it causes even more problems. Lead can interfere with the production of blood cells and the absorption of calcium that bones need to grow healthy and strong. Calcium is essential for strong bones and teeth, muscle contraction, and nerve and blood vessel function.

What are the Effects of Long-Term Lead Poisoning?

Lead poisoning may lead to a variety of health problems in kids, including:

- decreased bone and muscle growth
- poor muscle coordination

How Does Lead Poisoning Occur?

Most commonly, kids get lead poisoning from lead-based paint, which was used in many U.S. homes until the late 1970s, when the government banned the manufacture of paint containing lead.

That's why kids who live in older homes are at a greater risk for lead poisoning. Also at risk are those who immigrate to the United States or are adopted from a foreign country that doesn't regulate the use of lead.

Lead is also found in other environmental areas, including:

- Contaminated soil, which is found near busy streets, in part because lead was an ingredient in gasoline until the late 1970s. The soil that surrounds homes that were painted with lead-based paint may be contaminated too. Contaminated soil is a particular concern because it can also introduce lead dust into the home.
- Water that flows through old lead pipes or faucets, if the pipes begin to break down
- Food stored in bowls glazed or painted with lead, or imported from countries that use lead to seal canned food
- Some toys, jewelry, hobby, and sports objects (like stained glass, ink, paint, and plaster)
- Some folk or home remedies, such as greta and azarcon (used to treat an upset stomach)

How Do I Know If My Child Has Lead Poisoning?

Many kids with lead poisoning don't show any signs of being sick, so it's important to eliminate lead risks at home and to have your young child tested for lead exposure.

When kids do develop symptoms of lead poisoning, they usually appear as:

- irritability or behavioral problems
- [pica](#) (eating of nonnutritious things such as dirt and paint chips)
- difficulty concentrating
- headaches
- loss of appetite
- weight loss
- sluggishness or fatigue
- abdominal pain
- vomiting or nausea
- constipation
- pallor (pale skin) from anemia (lower than normal red blood cells)
- metallic taste in mouth
- muscle and joint weakness or pain
- seizures

These symptoms may also indicate a wide variety of other illnesses, so if your child has any of them, talk to your doctor. A blood test may be necessary to look for lead poisoning or other health problems.

Please go to Page 2 for Tips on Protecting your child from Lead Exposure

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How Do I Protect My Child?

You can protect your kids from lead poisoning by ensuring that your home is lead-free — ask your local health department about having your home evaluated for lead sources. And have your kids tested for lead exposure, particularly if when they're between 6 months and 3 years old. Kids this age spend a lot of time on the floor and trying to put things in their mouths.

These tips can help you reduce the risk of lead exposure:

- **Be wary of old plumbing.** Old plumbing might be lined with lead. If you have an old plumbing system (in homes built before 1970), let cold water run from the faucet for a minute before drinking it. If possible, drink bottled water instead. And because hot water absorbs more lead than cold water, don't use hot tap water for meals.
- **Keep your home and your family clean.** Wash your child's hands and toys frequently, and keep dusty surfaces clean with a wet cloth.
- **Ensure that iron and calcium are in your diets.** If kids are exposed to lead, good nutrition can reduce the amount that will actually be absorbed inside the body. Eating regular meals is helpful because lead is absorbed more during fasting.
- **Know where your kids play.** Keep them away from busy roads and the underside of bridges.

If you suspect that you might have lead-based paint on your walls, use a wet cloth to wipe windowsills and walls. Watch out for water damage that can make paint peel. Sanding or heating lead-based paint is a bad idea because these increase the risk that lead will be inhaled. If the paint doesn't have many chips, a new layer of paint, paneling, or drywall will probably reduce the risk. It's best to consult a professional, especially because other precautions may need to be taken to contain the lead in the paint.

How is Lead Poisoning Treated?

Treatment for lead poisoning varies depending on how much lead is in the blood. Small amounts can often be treated rather easily; the most important part of therapy is reduction of lead exposure. Gradually, as the body naturally eliminates the lead, the level of lead in the blood will fall.

Kids with severe cases and extremely high lead levels in their blood will be hospitalized to receive a medication called a chelating agent, which chemically binds with lead, through an IV to make the lead weaker so the body can get rid of it naturally.

All siblings of a child found to have lead poisoning also should be tested. Doctors will report cases of lead poisoning to the public health department.

If you need or would like more Information about Lead and your Child

You are invited to go to:

www.KidsHealth.Org/Parent/

Type "LEAD" in the Search Box