

Lead Poisoning Prevention

Lead is a metal. Lead poisoning is the harmful buildup of lead in the body. **Even small amounts can be very harmful to the growth of a young child's brain.** Lead poisoning can cause learning and behavior problems, lower IQs, attention deficit (ADD), and hearing and speech problems. Sometimes brain damage cannot be reversed, even with treatment.

Children under the age of 6 are at highest risk for lead poisoning. This is because they put non-food objects and their fingers in their mouths.

There are many places where children can be exposed to lead. Most older homes have lead paint. Even if non-lead paint covers leaded paint, when plaster or paint peels or chips, lead dust can go into the air and fall on surfaces.

Other places where children can be exposed to lead are:

- Painted wood that is burned, sanded or heat-stripped
- Lead pipes used in plumbing and the water that runs through these pipes
- Soil contaminated by industry that has used things made with lead - batteries, large use of leaded gasoline
- Lead crystal glassware and lead-glazed pottery, especially imported pottery
- Some children's toys and jewelry
- Some imported foods and candies
- Cosmetics - especially lipsticks
- Folk remedies - kohl (surma), greta, azarcon, kandu, pay-loo-ah, ghasard, bala goli
- Jobs or hobbies like soldering, welding or casting metals, handling bullets and fishing weights, making stained glass or collecting old lead soldiers and toys

Your child's risk

The Ohio Department of Health's Lead Prevention Program checklist can help you identify your child's risk for lead poisoning.

Does your child:

- Live in a house or often visit a building older than 1978? This includes a daycare center, preschool or home of a babysitter or relative.
- Have a brother, sister or playmate who has had lead poisoning?
- Have frequent contact with an adult whose hobby or work involves lead? Examples are construction, welding, pottery making, painting and casting metals.
- Live near an active or former lead smelter, battery recycling plant or other such industry?
- Use any traditional folk or homemade remedies?
- Has lived or the mother has lived overseas for a while or was born outside the US?
- Mother was exposed to lead during her pregnancy?

If you answer “yes” or “do not know” to any of these questions, your child is at risk.

The doctor will order a blood lead test if your child:

- Is at risk and is younger than 6 years of age.
- Is on Medicaid. A test is required.
- Lives in a high-risk zip code. A test is recommended.

Signs of lead poisoning

A blood lead test is the only way to know if a child has lead poisoning. Most children with lead poisoning do not have symptoms. If they do, they may include:

- Headache
- Stomachache or cramps
- Fussiness or crankiness
- Weight loss
- Constipation or diarrhea
- Trouble sleeping

Signs of **severe** lead poisoning include:

- Vomiting
- Dizziness
- Joint pain
- Seizures
- Listlessness (no energy)

How to help prevent lead poisoning

- Check to make sure the toys your child plays with have no lead. If you think your child has been exposed to a toy that has lead, remove it right away.
 - Only a certified laboratory can accurately test a toy for lead. Home testing kits may not be reliable for finding low levels of lead.
 - To check for toy recalls or to get on the mailing list to receive recall alerts, go to <http://www.cpsc.gov/> or call the United States Consumer Product Safety Commission at 1-800-638-2772.

- Teach your child to practice good hand washing before meals and after playing outdoors. Thoroughly wash hands with soap and water if your child has played in dirt or touched things made of lead.
- Use an all-purpose cleaning solution to damp-mop dusty areas. Use wet paper towels around windows and corners. Keep your house as dust-free as possible.
- Avoid using home remedies and cosmetics that may contain lead.
- Use only cold water from the tap for drinking, cooking and making baby formula. Hot water is more likely to contain higher levels of lead. Allow water to run for 2 to 3 minutes before using.
- After working where lead might be, remove shoes before entering the home. Shower and change clothes.
- Never allow small children or pregnant women in the area where homes built before 1978 are being remodeled.
- Do not store food in lead-glazed pottery. Imported pottery is more likely to have lead glazes. Do not let children drink from lead crystal baby bottles or glassware.
- Ask your health department for information about lead clean-up or removal.

Good nutrition

Good nutrition is very important. Often, children with lead poisoning are anemic. This means that they do not have enough iron. The less iron in the body, the more lead the body will absorb.

Children need to eat foods that have a lot of iron, protein, vitamin C and calcium. Iron-rich foods and foods with vitamin C work together to help the body absorb more iron. This reduces lead in the blood.

Foods high in calcium block lead absorption.

- Foods **high in iron** and protein are beef, pork, chicken, turkey, fish, eggs, iron-fortified cereals and green leafy vegetables (Picture 1).
- Foods **high in vitamin C** (fresh, frozen or canned) are citrus fruits or juices with vitamin C added, broccoli, red and green peppers, brussels sprouts and green leafy vegetables.

Have your child eat foods high in vitamin C at the same time they eat foods high in iron.

- Foods **high in calcium** are milk, cheese, pudding, yogurt, soy, ice cream, broccoli and green leafy vegetables. High calcium foods should be eaten at least an hour before or after your child eats foods with iron.



Picture 1 Foods high in protein often have a lot of iron.

Follow-up care

If your child has lead poisoning or is at high risk for lead poisoning, they may need to get tested more often. Your healthcare provider will let you know. Your local health department will also contact you to find out the source of the lead exposure. There will be no cost for their inspection.

For more information about lead poisoning, contact:

- The Ohio Department of Health's Ohio Healthy Homes and Lead Poisoning Prevention program <https://odh.ohio.gov/wps/portal/gov/odh/know-our-programs/childhood-lead-poisoning/for-parents/> Phone: (877) LEADSAFE (877) 532-3723.
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) <https://www.cdc.gov/nceh/lead/>
- The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA): <https://www.epa.gov/sites/production/files/documents/nutrition.pdf>
- County or city health department
- **Columbus** – For directions to the nearest Nationwide Children's Hospital Laboratory Service Center, please call Laboratory Services at (800) 934-6575 or visit NationwideChildrens.org/Lab.
- **Toledo** – Nationwide Children's Hospital - Toledo's pediatric primary care centers screen for lead poisoning. Visit NationwideChildrens.org/Toledo to find a location near you.