



Information for Parents/Guardians about Lead Poisoning



Lead poisoning is a serious but *preventable* health problem. Lead can cause permanent damage—especially to the developing brains and nervous systems of unborn children and children under six years old.

While no amount of lead in the body is safe, the effects depend upon the level of lead in the blood. In children, even very low levels are associated with lowered intelligence, behavior problems, growth problems, hearing loss, and problems in maintaining a steady posture. Moderate levels can also harm the kidneys and liver. Very high levels can cause deafness, blindness, coma, convulsions, and even death.

Children who have been lead poisoned are much more likely to have problems with reading, vocabulary, attention, fine-motor coordination, school attendance, and academic achievement. They are more likely to drop out of high school.

Lead can also damage adults. It can cause problems with reproduction, blood pressure, digestion, the nervous system, memory and concentration, and muscles and joints.



How could your child be exposed to lead?

Lead paint was banned for use in U.S. homes in 1978, but many houses and apartment buildings built before 1978 still have lead paint. As the paint gets old, it may create dust and chips that contain lead. If children swallow the dust or chips, or breathe in dust, they can become lead poisoned. As a result, children who live in or visit homes built before 1978 may be at risk for lead poisoning. And if a home with lead paint has been or is being remodeled or renovated without proper precautions, these home repairs can create dangerous lead dust

and paint chips.

Other sources include water contaminated with lead from pipes, soil contaminated with old paint or old leaded gasoline, batteries, and some old or imported toys, novelties, and pottery. Adults who work in lead industries (such as a battery plant, radiator repair shop, or construction) could carry lead particles home on their clothing, shoes, and hair.

What are the signs and symptoms of lead poisoning?

Children with lead poisoning may not look or act sick. And even if the children do show some signs of lead poisoning, these symptoms can often be mistaken for other illnesses, such as the flu, or other conditions.

Early symptoms may include tiredness or restlessness, stomachache, constipation, irritability, and poor appetite. As more lead accumulates, children may become clumsy and weak, and they may lose skills that they have already learned. More severe symptoms may include vomiting, loss of sight or hearing, and loss of consciousness.

Children who are *not* lead poisoned may also show some of these symptoms. And many of the symptoms of lead poisoning may also indicate other health conditions or learning and behavior

problems. However, **if you suspect lead poisoning, ask your medical provider to test the lead level in your child's blood.**

In Connecticut, all children who are 9-35 months old must be screened for lead poisoning each year—and at other times if medically indicated.

How might lead poisoning affect behavior?

Babies and toddlers may seem especially unhappy or cranky and may be difficult to soothe or cuddle. They may cry or fuss more than normal, have feeding and sleeping problems, or seem very sensitive to touch, tastes, noises, smells, or sounds. They may be late in babbling or talking.



Preschoolers may seem overactive, fidgety, uncooperative. They may have difficulty paying attention while playing or performing simple tasks, talk too much, and seem not to listen.

School-age children may have problems concentrating and learning, perform poorly, disrupt their classes, have problems with other children, and have difficulty tolerating frustration.

All of these behaviors may be normal to some extent or from time to time, or may be due to other conditions, but they may be greater or last longer in children with lead poisoning.

Some of these behaviors may make parents, guardians, or caregivers feel annoyed or resentful and therefore less affectionate toward the child. They may feel like talking less and spending less time with that child. Understanding that these problems are caused by lead poisoning may help the adults to handle the children more effectively. Some ways of helping challenging children include the following:

- **Set up the child to succeed**
 - Encourage positive behaviors.
 - Set up a routine to give children a regular structure for each day.
 - Try to arrange the environment to help children behave calmly. For example, if noise disturbs a child, use carpeting to reduce the sound level and limit the number of children who can play in an area at any one time.
- **Plan ahead to avoid problems**
 - If children are having trouble concentrating on a task, give them a break or move them to new activities.
 - Warn children when something new or different is about to happen. Allow them time to adjust to the new situation, watching or staying near a caring adult during the experience.
 - Warn children when an activity will soon end. Give them limits that they can understand. Example: “You can push the lever two more times, and then you must stop.”
- **Respond calmly to problems**
 - Step in calmly before children lose control. Help them move to another activity, cool off with a quiet activity (such as reading or coloring), or let off steam with active but safe play.
- **Use available resources**
 - If very young children are having difficulty, investigate resources such as the Birth to Three System.
 - If children are struggling in school, investigate whether they need and are eligible for special educational services.
 - For more information, call your local health department, the Connecticut Department of Public Health, or Infoline (2-1-1).