

Public Health Fact Sheet

LEAD

What is Lead?

Lead is a metal that is found naturally all over the earth. It is a versatile metal and is used in many household and hobby products. Before 1978, lead was used in house paint. Many older homes were built with water pipes joined with lead solder. Lead is also contained in some ammunitions, automotive radiators, pewter, pottery, folk medicines, leaded crystal glass, and as a contaminant in trace amounts in many products. Because of health concerns, lead is no longer added to gasoline and house paints. Additionally, lead solder for sealing tin food cans has been eliminated in the United States.

How are people exposed to lead?

Because lead has had such widespread use, people can be exposed from a variety of sources, including:

- eating or drinking items contaminated with lead;
- occupational exposures, such as manufacture or recycling of batteries, manufacture of lead weights, shot and sinkers and certain ceramics, lead soldering, smelter operations;
- breathing lead containing dust;
- hobbies, such as working with stained glass, lead figurines, recreational shooting, melting lead for fishing weights, and using lead glazes for ceramics.

Can lead affect my health?

Lead can interfere with the function of cells throughout the body and can affect many systems. Lead can affect both children and adults, but children may be more vulnerable to the effects of lead. High levels of lead may affect the nervous system, kidneys, and bone marrow. In children, low level of lead may affect their school performance and behavior.

Is there a Medical Test to show whether I've been exposed to lead?

A blood test is available to measure the amount of lead in your blood and to estimate the amount of your recent exposure to lead. Blood tests are commonly used to screen children for lead exposure.

What Can I do to Prevent Exposure to Lead?

- If your home was built before 1978, consider having your home tested for lead paint.
- Use a certified contractor to remove lead paint and to do repair work involving areas where lead paint is present.
- Keep children away from chipping or peeling paint.
- Keep your home clean.
- Teach your children to regularly wash their hands, especially before eating.

Who do I call for more information?

If you have any health questions or concerns, we encourage you to contact your health care provider. If you are a TRICARE beneficiary, contact the Regional Nurse Advice Line (1-800-TRICARE, press option 1).

Additional web resources are:

www.healthychildren.org
<http://familydoctor.org/familydoctor/en.html>
<http://www.cdc.gov/nceh/lead/>