

What Is Lead Poisoning?

Blood lead poisoning is the presence of lead in the body. Lead was widely used in paint, gasoline, jewelry, and other products before it was recognized as harmful and phased out. However, lead can still be found in older homes, antiques, ceramics, ammunition, and in many other objects. Despite efforts to limit the use of lead in the United States, it may come in objects and spices from other countries where it is still in use.

The most common cause of lead poisoning is lead-based paint found in homes built before 1978. When lead paint chips and falls, it may then be consumed or breathed in. This is especially harmful for children under 6 years old as lead can cause the most harm to their still-developing bodies and brains. Younger children are also at higher risk due to hand-to-mouth activity. Lead exposure occurs when a child comes in contact with lead by touching, swallowing, or breathing in lead or lead dust. Children may also be exposed to lead through contaminated soil, parent hobbies and professions, antiques, or imported goods, such as spices, painted ceramics, and remedies.

How Does Lead Poisoning Affect Kids?

There is no safe blood lead level. Lead poisoning can affect your child's physical and mental growth in ways that may go unnoticed until they are school-age. Lead poisoning has been found to:

- Damage the brain and nervous system
- Slow growth and development
- Cause learning and behavior problems
- Cause hearing and speech problems

This can cause:

- Lower IQ
- Decreased ability to pay attention
- Underperformance in school

Testing for lead poisoning is the only way to know. The recommendation is to have your child tested at ages 12 and 24 months. Testing is recommended for children under 6 years old who were not tested before. At-home test kits are available to test your home's paint and water for lead.

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What Can I Do?

As a caregiver, there are steps you can take to help reduce or prevent your child's exposure to lead.



Clean Hands

Wash your child's hands, especially after playing outside, before eating, and before bed. Wash any toys, pacifiers, or other objects your child may put in their mouth regularly with warm soapy water.



Clean Home

Use wet mops, wet wipes, or warm soapy water to clean dust from floors and windowsills. If you have peeling or chipped paint that may contain lead, have a [specialist](#) look at it or use an at-home test kit. When doing renovations, keep your child away and the area closed. When your child plays outside, make sure they play in a clean, covered sandbox or in grassy areas to keep them from potentially contaminated soil.



Healthy Foods

Make sure your child has a well-balanced diet that includes vitamin C, iron, and calcium. For more information on nutrition, please visit U.S. Department of Agriculture's nutritional website at [nutrition.gov/topics/nutrition-life-stage](https://www.nutrition.gov/topics/nutrition-life-stage).



Listen To Your Doctor

Your family doctor will have resources to help you address your child's blood lead levels, which may include a re-test to see if levels change or connecting you with a specialist who can help. If you have questions, your doctor is there to help. Your local health department also has [resources](#) available to help you keep your child healthy and lead-free.

For more information visit the Florida Department of Health Lead Poisoning Prevention Program:
<https://www.floridahealth.gov/environmental-health/lead-poisoning/index.html>