



Common Sources of Lead

Lead is found in the air, soil, dust, and the paint of some older homes and buildings. Being exposed to too much lead can cause serious health problems. The following information will explain the most common sources of lead inside and outside the home.

Lead-based Paint and Dust

Lead paint was used on the inside and outside of homes and buildings built before 1978. Lead-based paint is typically not dangerous if the paint is intact. As lead paint deteriorates, it may crack, chip, peel, or develop an alligatored appearance. Some painted surfaces may be bumped, damaged, or experience friction. Dust from these surfaces may create a lead health hazard. Home remodeling creates lead dust as well. Lead paint dust and tracked in (urban) soil is the most common source of lead exposure for young children.

Soil

Soil can contain lead. The area adjacent to a home or building's foundation can contain lead-based paint chips and dust, especially if remodeling has occurred. Lead dust can remain in soil from past leaded gas emissions, demolished buildings, and industrial waste emissions.

Food

Plants do not usually absorb significant amounts of lead. It is good practice to plant gardens away from older buildings and fences. Raised garden beds filled with unleaded soil are suggested for urban gardens where the soil lead contents are high. Some imported canned foods may continue to use lead solder. Once these cans are opened, the food must be removed immediately. Acidic foods can cause lead to leach out from lead crystal and pottery fired with leaded glaze.

Water

Small amounts of lead may leach into water if there is a lead service line or if the water system has lead pipes or copper pipes with lead solder. Plumbing installed before 1930 may contain lead pipes. In June 1985, Minnesota banned the use of water pipes joined with lead-based solder. New brass faucets may also contain lead. The only way to determine if your water has lead in it is to have the water tested by a certified lab. The laboratory at the Saint Paul—Ramsey County Department of Public Health does water testing: 651-266-1321. The Minnesota Department of Health can provide you with other water analysis labs: 651-215-0890. Also, refer to [Questions about Lead Poisoning](#).

Traditional Medicine and Cosmetics

Some traditional medicines and cosmetics may contain lead and should not be used.

In Arab communities:

Kohl
Surma
Alkohol

In Asian communities:

Ghasard
Bali goli
Kandu
Pay-loo-ah (Hmong)
Sindoor (Indian)
Bindi dot (Indian)

In Latino communities:

Alarcon
Azarcon
Maria luisa
Coral
Greta
Liga
Rueda
Cora

Hobbies/ Occupations

Certain hobbies, activities, and occupations may involve the use of lead or products that contain lead. Continued, unprotected exposure to lead may cause lead poisoning.

- Ammunition/explosives maker
- Auto repair, auto body work or parts
- Battery manufacturing and repair
- Boat, bicycle, and car building or repair
- Bridge, tunnel, highway painting/construction
- Bronze casting
- Cable/wire stripping, splicing or production
- Ceramics/pottery/tile making
- Chemical production and use
- Collecting, painting, or playing games with lead figurines
- Copper enameling
- Demolition of buildings and metal structures
- Electronics with lead solder
- Firing range work, or activities using firearms
- Foundry work
- Glass or crystal manufacturing and recycling
- Jewelry making or repair with lead solder
- Lead abatement
- Lead miner
- Liquor distillation
- Manufacturing of industrial machinery and equipment
- Metal scrap yards and recycling operations
- Metal smelting, welding, etc
- Paint/pigment manufacturing
- Painters of building, cars, boats, bicycles
- Paint removal (sandblasting, scraping, sanding, heat gun or torch)
- Plumbing manufacturing or installation
- Print making and other fine arts
- Radiator repair
- Remodeling/repainting/renovating houses or buildings
- Smelting/melting lead for fishing sinkers, bullets, lead figurines
- Stained glass, leaded glass work
- Steel metal work
- Welding, soldering, burning, cutting or torching