



Frequently asked questions about

Lead Safe Home

From the Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency

What are common sources for lead poisoning?

If your home was built before 1978, there is a good chance it has lead-based paint. In 1978, the federal government banned consumer uses of lead-containing paint, but some states banned it even earlier.

Lead from paint, including lead-contaminated dust, is one of the most common causes of lead poisoning. Deteriorating lead-based paint (peeling, chipping, chalking, cracking, damaged, or damp) creates lead dust which is also a hazard and needs immediate attention. Renovation, repair or painting activities can contribute to lead dust when painted surfaces are disturbed or demolished.

Lead can be found in pipes and solder. Lead is used in some water service lines and household plumbing materials. Lead can leach, or enter the water, as water flows through the plumbing. Lead pipes and lead solder were commonly used until 1986.

Lead dust can be tracked into the home from soil outside that is contaminated by deteriorated exterior lead-based paint and other lead sources, such as industrial pollution and past use of leaded gasoline.

Certain hobbies, such as hunting, fishing, making stained glass, pottery and/or working on stock cars, can increase exposure to lead. Lead contamination of the home occurs through the hobbyists' clothes and other personal belongings.

How to I prevent lead exposure related to lead paint and dust?

It is very important to care for the lead-painted surfaces in your home. Lead-based paint in good condition is usually not harmful. If your home was built before 1978:

- Regularly check your home for chipping, peeling, or deteriorating paint, and address issues promptly without excessive sanding. If you must sand, sand the minimum area needed, wet the area first, and clean up thoroughly.
- Regularly check all painted areas that rub together or get lots of wear, like windows, doors, and stairways, for any signs of deterioration.
- Regularly check for paint chips or dust – if you see some, remove carefully with a damp paper towel and discard in the trash, then wipe the surface clean with a wet paper towel.
- Wipe down flat surfaces, like window sills, at least weekly with a damp paper towel and throw away the paper towel.
- Mop smooth floors (using a damp mop) weekly to control dust.

Remember to test for the presence of lead and lead hazards by a lead professional – this will tell you where you must be especially careful. Fix any hazards that you may have. You can get your home checked in one or both of the following ways:

- A paint inspection — Tells you the lead content of every different type of painted surface in your home, but does not tell you if the paint is a hazard or how to deal with it. This is most appropriate when you are buying a home or signing a lease, before you renovate, and to help you determine how to maintain your home for lead safety.
- A risk assessment — Tells you if there are any sources of serious lead exposure such as peeling paint and lead dust, and tells you what actions to take to address these hazards. This is most helpful if you want to know if lead is causing exposure to your family now.

Have qualified professionals do the work. There are standards in place for certifying lead-based paint professionals to ensure the work is done safely, reliably, and effectively. You can have a combined risk assessment and inspection.

Renovations, repair jobs and paint jobs in pre-1978 homes and buildings can create significant amounts of lead-based paint dust. If your contractor will disturb lead-based paint while renovating, repairing or painting your home, he or she must be trained in lead-safe work practices. If you are a do-it yourselfer, be sure to learn how to protect yourself and your family from exposure to lead-based paint.

How do I prevent lead exposure related to lead found in the plumbing?

Testing your home's drinking water is the only way to confirm if lead is present. Most water systems test for lead at a certain number of homes as a regular part of water monitoring. These tests give a system-wide picture of whether or not corrosion is being controlled but do not reflect conditions at each home served by that water system. Since each home has different plumbing pipes and materials, test results are likely to be different for each home.

You may want to test your water if:

- your home has lead pipes (lead is a dull gray metal that is soft enough to be easily scratched with a house key), or
- your non-plastic plumbing was installed before 1986.

You can buy lead testing kits in home improvement stores to collect samples to then send to a laboratory for analysis. If your home tests positive for lead:

- **Flush your pipes before drinking, and only use cold water for cooking and drinking.** Anytime the water in a particular faucet has not been used for six hours or longer, flush your cold-water pipes by running the water until it becomes cold. Contact your water utility to verify flushing times for your area.
- **Consider replacing lead-containing plumbing fixtures.** If you are considering this, keep in mind that the Safe Drinking Water Act (SDWA) requires that only lead-free pipe, solder, or flux may be used in the installation or repair of a public water system, or any plumbing in residential or non-residential facility providing water for human consumption. SDWA also requires plumbing fittings and fixtures intended to dispense water for human consumption (e.g., kitchen and bathroom faucets) meet a lead leaching standard. Those fittings and fixtures should be certified according to NSF/ANSI Standard 61 for lead reduction Exit.
- **Consider alternative sources or treatment of water.** If you discover that you have high levels of lead in your home, you should consider using bottled water or a water filter. There are many home water filters that are certified for effective lead reduction, but devices that are not designed to remove lead will not work. Verify the claims of manufacturers by checking with independent certifying organizations. [NSF International](#) [Exit](#) and the [Water Quality Association](#) [Exit](#) provide lists of

treatment devices they have certified. Underwriters Laboratories [Exit](#) is also a good resource for certified devices. Be sure to maintain and replace a filter device in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions to protect water quality.

Refer to the manufacturer's instructions for maintenance procedures. If not maintained properly, some treatment devices may increase lead and other contaminant levels.

How do I prevent lead exposure through soil?

Check the exterior of your home, including porches and fences, for flaking or deteriorating lead-based paint that may contaminate soil in your yard or be tracked into your house. To avoid tracking contaminated soil into your house, put doormats outside and inside all entryways, and remove your shoes before entering.

To reduce exposure to lead, after playing or working outdoors children and adults leave their shoes at the door or use door mats, and wash their hands. To keep children from playing in soil near your home, plant bushes close to the house. Read about EPA recommendations on best management practices for gardening in lead contaminated areas to reduce lead exposure from contaminated soil.

Also, older playground equipment can still contain old lead-based paint, and artificial turf and playground surfaces made from shredded rubber can contain lead. Take precautions to ensure young children do not eat shredded rubber, or put their hands in their mouth before washing them.

How do I prevent lead exposure from a hobby?

If you have a job or hobby where you may come into contact with lead:

- never put leaded materials (for example, fishing sinkers, lead came or solder for stained glass or leaded pottery clay or glaze) in your mouth,
- avoid handling food or touching your mouth or face while engaged in working with lead materials and wash hands before eating or drinking following such activities,
- shower and change clothes before entering your vehicle or coming home,
- launder your work and hobby clothes separately from the rest of your family's clothes, and
- keep all work and hobby materials away from living areas.

If someone in your family is a renovator or contractor working in older housing, find out more about lead-safe work practices.

If you are an owner or operator of outdoor rifle, pistol, trap, skeet or sporting clay ranges, find out more about lead management at ranges.

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