



# Frequently asked questions about Childhood Lead Screening

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

## **How does lead harm the body?**

Too much lead can harm both children and adults. No one knows exactly how much lead it takes to cause health problems. Many times there are no symptoms until the health problems are very serious. Usually people who are lead poisoned do not seem to be sick.

Lead poisoning can cause learning, behavior and health problems in young children. Lead can cause high blood pressure and kidney damage in adults.

## **What causes lead poisoning?**

Many things in our everyday lives put infants, children and adults in danger of lead poisoning.

Lead-based paint was used in many homes built before 1978. The older the home, the more likely that windows, cupboards, doors porches, and outdoor surfaces contain lead-based paint.

Children are most often poisoned by lead dust and lead paint in older homes. Lead dust can come from repairing areas with lead paint, opening and closing windows, and through normal wear and tear of painted areas. Lead dust settles to the floor and gets on children's hands and toys. Lead enters their bodies when they put their hands or toys into their mouths.

We now realize just how dangerous lead is. There are things you can do to keep your children safe from lead poisoning.

## **How can I tell if my child has been lead poisoned?**

A lead-poisoned child may seem healthy or have any of the following signs:

- Learning and behavior problems
- Tiredness
- Headaches
- Hearing problems
- Weight loss
- Hyperactivity
- Irritability

## **When should my child be tested for lead poisoning?**

Medicaid requires children be tested at 1 and 2 years of age. Children not tested must be tested at least once between the ages of 3 and 6 years. All other children should be screened using the screening questions below.

## **How can I determine if my child should be tested?**

The following questions can help you identify your child's risk for lead poisoning:

- Does the child now or in the recent past live in or often visit a house built before 1950 with peeling or chipping paint? This could include a day care, preschool, or home of a relative.
- Does the child now or in the recent past live in or often visit a house built before 1978 that has been remodeled within the last year?
- Does the child have a brother or sister (or playmate) with lead poisoning?
- Does the child live with an adult whose job or hobby involves lead?
- Does the child's family use any home remedies that may contain lead?

If you answered no to every question, this means your child is at **LOW RISK** for lead poisoning.

If you answered yes or don't know to any of these questions, this means your child is at **HIGH RISK** for lead poisoning. The only way to know for sure is to have your child tested. Talk to your child's doctor to arrange for a blood test. Show the doctor this questionnaire so he or she knows why your child is at risk.

## **How do I get my child tested for lead poisoning?**

Ask your family doctor or Pediatrician to do a blood lead test on your child at 12 months and 24 months of age. Medicaid insurance will pay for the cost of the test if your child is enrolled. If you have private insurance, coverage may vary. The cost of a blood lead test which is sent to the Michigan Department of Community Health Lead Laboratory for analysis is \$11.

If your child needs a blood lead test, but your insurance will not pay for it, or you cannot afford to pay for it, the fee can be waived with permission from the laboratory.

If the family doctor or Pediatrician does not perform blood lead tests in their office, he or she may refer you to a laboratory or the local health department to have the blood lead test.

If the first blood lead test is done with a capillary sample (finger prick), and the analysis of the sample is 5 micrograms per deciliter or greater, **it will be very important for you to bring your child back for a venous (from the vein), blood sample to confirm the results.**

Call your local health department as listed below or the Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Program at (517) 335-8885 if you have further questions about getting your child tested for lead poisoning.

## **Is there a way to reduce high blood levels of lead?**

There is a treatment used to bring down high blood lead levels. Certain medicines combine with lead so the body can get rid of it more easily. The doctor will decide if a child needs this treatment. The best way to lower an elevated blood lead level is to prevent continued exposure to lead.

## **What else can I do to protect my child?**

- Wash your child's hands, bottles, pacifiers and toys often.
- Test the soil your child plays in.

- Make sure children eat healthy foods and snacks such as lean meat, chicken, turkey and fish, milk, low-fat cheese, yogurt, broccoli, collard and turnip greens, oranges or grapefruits, orange or grapefruit juice, potatoes, tomatoes and peppers. Low-fat milk and foods are best for children over the age of two.
- Have your home checked for lead hazards.
- Keep floors, window sills and other surfaces dust and dirt free.
- Take off shoes when entering the house.
- Talk to your landlord about fixing peeling or chipping paint.
- Take precautions to avoid exposure to lead dust when remodeling or renovating.
- Don't use a power sander, open flame torch, heat gun above 1,100 degrees Fahrenheit, dry scraper, or sandpaper on painted surfaces that may contain lead.
- Use very cold tap water for drinking and cooking.
- Learn how to remove lead-based paint safely.

**To learn about health department services and/or other health topics  
visit us on the web:**

**[www.bhsj.org](http://www.bhsj.org)**

**Or call your local Health Department office at:**

**Coldwater**  
**517-279-9561 x 0105#**

**Hillsdale**  
**517-437-7395 x 0307#**

**Three Rivers**  
**269-273-2161 x 0241#**