**Lead and its effects on your health**

**What is lead and how can it affect me?**

- Lead (also known by its chemical symbol, Pb) is a heavy metal used in some products.
- Exposure to high amounts of lead can cause buildup of lead in the body or lead poisoning.
- It is important to know how to check for lead poisoning and, better yet, learn ways to avoid its harmful effects.

**Where is it found?**

- Lead can be found in dust, soil, and old paint in pre-1978 housing.
- Low levels of lead have also been reported in tap water, pots and pans, glazed pottery, and toys.
- Lead particles can also be found in fumes from jobs that involve metal processing.

**Who is at risk?**

- Children under six years old, including a developing fetus, are most at risk, but lead is bad for everyone.
- Since children are mentally and physically growing, it is more likely to slow their development.
- Adults exposed at work, specifically construction workers, artists, plumbers, manufacturers of bullets, ceramics, electrical components, battery and other recycling, glass, stained glass workers, and jewelers.

**Symptoms of lead poisoning**

Headaches, vomiting, stomachaches, poor appetite, and trouble sleeping. These may be hard to identify, so getting a lead blood test is the best way to check if you or someone else has lead poisoning.

**What are the effects of lead exposure?**

- High amounts of lead exposure can lead to brain damage, heart, reproductive, and developmental problems.

**Preventing exposure from water sources**

- People can be exposed to lead in households through old pipes.
- If you are worried about lead in your water, pipes can be checked by calling a plumber. The EPA does **NOT** recommend water test kits at local hardware stores.
- The **most effective** method is to remove the source causing the lead exposure.
- If you can’t remove pipes, some water filters remove lead. To be sure your water filter will actually remove lead, get one that’s been certified by **NSF International** under both NSF/ANSI-53 (for total lead) and NSF/ANSI-42 (for fine particulate).
- Flushing water pipes for up to 2 minutes before drinking and using only cold tap water for drinking and cooking help reduce lead exposure.

**Preventing exposure from other sources**
• Talk to your health department about testing for lead in paint in a house built before 1978.
• Lead paint can be painted over. Hire a painter with EPA lead abatement certification (see Resources).
• Lead exposure in household dust from old ceilings and paint can be reduced by cleaning the house often.
• Vacuum with a HEPA filter and clean often with a damp microfiber mop to get rid of dust with lead particles. Pay special attention to kids’ play areas.
• For children and adults, eating a well-balanced diet can reduce lead absorbed by the body.
• If using or working at a firing range, wash well after leaving and change clothes (and wash them separately) to avoid bringing home lead.

References


Resources

National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences: Lead, Lead and Your Health

CDC: Prevent Children’s Exposure to Lead, En Espanol: Prevenga la exposición de los niños al plomo

EPA: Lead Hotline - The National Lead Information Center, The Lead-Safe Certified Guide to Renovate Right

EPA: A Consumer Tool for Identifying Point of Use (POU) Drinking Water Filters Certified to Reduce Lead

The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) Lead: Information for Workers

Little Things Matter Videos: Crime of the Century: The Lead Pandemic