

# Fact Sheet



Division of Developmental Disabilities Health Care Services

## Blood Lead Poisoning

### Health Information Fact Sheet



*Lead* is a naturally occurring metal that can cause negative health effects. People are exposed to lead by eating lead paint chips, ingesting contaminated food or water, and/or by breathing in lead dust. Children younger than 6 years are more likely to be exposed. Young children tend to put their hands or other objects, which may be contaminated with lead dust, into their mouths. This makes them more likely to be exposed to lead than older children. The health effects of exposure are more harmful to children less than six years of age.

*Fact Sheet guidelines have been provided as general information, not as a substitution for medical treatment from a physician.*

#### Lead in blood:

No safe blood lead level in children has been identified. Even low levels of lead in blood have been shown to affect learning, ability to pay attention, and academic achievement and are associated with developmental delays, difficulty learning, and behavioral issues. Lead quickly enters the blood and can harm a child's health. Once a child swallows lead, their blood lead level rises. Once a child's exposure to lead stops, the amount of lead in the blood decreases gradually. The child's body releases some of the lead through urine, sweat, and feces.

*Many things affect how a child's body handles exposure to lead, including the following:*

- Child's age
- Nutritional status
- Source of lead exposure
- Length of time the child was exposed
- Presence of other underlying health conditions

#### Risk Factors:

Some children are at a greater risk for lead exposure from paint, water, soil, some imported items and industrial sources. They may also be exposed through their parents and caregivers from certain jobs and hobbies.

#### Causes:

*Children can be exposed to lead where they live, learn, and play. Sources of lead exposure can include the following:*

- Chipping or peeling paint in homes or buildings built before 1978
- Water from lead pipes
- Soil near airports, highways, or factories
- Some imported candies and traditional medicines
- Some imported toys and jewelry
- Certain jobs and hobbies

#### What to Look Out For:

*Exposure to lead can seriously harm a child's health and cause well-documented adverse effects such as:*

- Damage to the brain and nervous system
- Slowed growth and development
- Learning and behavior problems
- Hearing and speech problems

*This can cause:*

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

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## Lead Poisoning Prevention:

- *Primary prevention* is the removal of lead hazards from the environment before a child is exposed to lead. It is the most effective way to ensure that children do not experience harmful long-term effects of lead exposure.
- *Secondary prevention* includes blood lead testing ordered by your health care provider and follow-up care.

## Testing for Lead Exposure

A blood lead level test that measures the amount of lead in blood is the best way to determine if a child has been exposed to lead. Most children with lead in their blood have no obvious symptoms. Talk to your child's health care provider about getting a blood lead test.

*It is recommended that children get tested for lead:*

- At ages 12 and 24 months, or
- At ages 24–72 months if there is no record of ever being tested

