

# How Much Do You Know about Lead Poisoning?

**1. How does lead harm the body?** High levels of lead can cause harm to both children and adults. Lead poisoning can cause learning, behavioral and health problems in young children. These include slowed development of the brain and/or brain damage. In adults, lead can cause high blood pressure and damage to the kidneys. In most cases, people don't show any symptoms until the lead levels are serious. People who have lead poisoning often do not seem to be sick.

**2. How can I tell if my child has too much lead in his/her body?** Many times your child may not seem to be sick. The symptoms that do result are very common and can appear for many reasons. Your child's doctor or primary care provider can do a simple blood test to find out if your child has a high level of lead in his/her blood.

**3. What are the symptoms of lead poisoning?**

Unfortunately, lead poisoning symptoms are not exclusive to lead poisoning. They also do not appear until lead levels are very high in the body. Below are symptoms that are often tied to lead poisoning:

- a. Loss of appetite
- b. Weight loss
- c. Loss of recently-learned skills/short-term memory loss
- d. Feeling sleepy/lack of energy
- e. Irritability/short tempered
- f. Headache
- g. Constipation/trouble moving bowels
- h. Stomach cramping
- i. Throwing up
- j. Cannot sleep



**4. Does your child need to be tested?** Your child's PCP is required to test your child twice between the ages of 9 months and 6 years (preferably once at 12 months and again at 24 months). It is important for your child to be tested for lead poisoning if you answer "yes" or "I don't know" to any of these questions:

- a. Does your child:
  - i. Live in or regularly visit a house built before 1978?** Does the house have chipping or peeling paint?
  - ii. Attend a daycare center/preschool/ babysitter's home built before 1978?** Does the house have chipping or peeling paint?



**iii. Live in or regularly visit a house built before 1978 with planned, recent (within the past year) or ongoing renovation/remodeling activity?**

**iv. Have a brother or sister, a playmate or other household member that tested positive for elevated levels of lead in their blood?**

**v. Often come in contact with an adult who works with lead?** Examples include construction, welding, pottery, or other trades performed in your community.

**vi. Do you give your child home folk remedies that may contain lead?**

## **5. What can I do to prevent lead poisoning?**

Do not forget that lead can be an occupational health hazard and may be found at your job site. People working as painters, remodelers, contractors, auto repair workers,

plumbers and battery factory workers can be exposed to lead while at work. You can help protect your child from lead dust by washing the floors of your home with soap and water as well as wiping down window sills, woodwork, cabinets, chairs, and tables as often as possible with a wet cloth.

**6. Is there a way to reduce high levels of lead in the blood?** Yes, there is medicine available to treat lead poisoning as well as therapy. Your doctor will decide if your child needs this care. However, the treatment will not work for children who have already suffered brain damage from lead poisoning. The best way to lower an elevated blood lead level is to prevent continued exposure to lead.

**7. Is my child's diet important?** Yes! A balanced food plan is very important. Food high in fat and oil allows the body to soak up lead. Eating food that has more calcium such as oranges, quinoa, spinach, yogurt and more iron, such as spinach, salmon, cabbage and low-fat milk, allows the body to soak up less lead.

**8. How do you get lead poisoning?** Lead poisoning occurs when too much lead builds up in the body. The human body does not use or need lead for any reason, so when it comes into contact with lead (for example: breathing in leaded fumes or dust, or swallowing something that has lead) it often flushes it out. This only happens when exposed to a small amount of lead. If you are exposed to a small amount over an extended period of time or one large dose it may build up and take more time to clear out of your body.

### **Sources:**

[cdc.gov/nceh/lead/parents.htm](https://www.cdc.gov/nceh/lead/parents.htm)  
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