

The Facts about Lead



What is Lead?

Lead is a naturally occurring metal found in the environment. It does not have a particular taste or smell. Human bodies do not need lead. When a person is exposed to lead by eating, drinking or breathing contaminated particles, it can be absorbed into the body. This can potentially cause health problems, especially with the brain, nervous systems and kidneys. Children, infants and fetuses are at especially high risk.

Where is Lead Usually Found?

The main sources of lead are lead-based paint and paint chips, lead-contaminated dust or soils and lead pipes found in older homes. Additionally, lead can be found in certain types of pottery, pewter, brass fixtures, food and food wrappers, house and car keys, older venetian blinds, some cosmetics, children's jewelry, some children's clothing, some candy and toys. Lead exposure risk may increase during home renovations.

How Do Levels of Lead Affect Children and Babies?

If not detected early, children and babies with lead in their bodies, even at low levels, can suffer from damage to their brain and nervous systems, possibly resulting in behavior problems and decreased I.Q. At higher levels, other effects are seen, such as slowed growth, hearing problems, kidney problems and more serious brain problems.

Lead and Pregnancy

During pregnancy, lead may cross the placenta to affect a developing baby. Lead in a pregnant woman's body can result in serious effects on the pregnancy and her developing fetus, including miscarriage and reduced growth of the fetus and premature birth.

Does a high lead level in my tap water cause health effects?

High levels of lead in tap water can cause health effects if the lead in the water enters the bloodstream and causes an elevated blood lead level.

Most studies show that exposure to lead-contaminated water alone would not be likely to elevate blood lead levels in most adults, even exposure to water with a lead content close to the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA's) "action level" for lead of 15 parts per billion (ppb). Risk will vary, however, depending upon the individual, the circumstances, and the amount of water consumed. For example, infants who drink formula prepared with lead-contaminated water may be at a higher risk because of the large volume of water they consume relative to their body size.

Should Your Children Be Tested For Lead?

Discuss your concerns with your doctor, but expect lead screening to occur at 1 and 2 years of age unless there are other specific concerns.



Treatment may include:

Environmental Controls

If you or your child has mild to moderate lead poisoning, you may not be given medication. The goal will be to eliminate all contact with lead in your home, workplace, and school, and carefully monitor blood levels until the lead has naturally worked its way out of the system.

Medications

For moderate lead poisoning or severe lead poisoning, medication may be needed. While many products are available to protect against or treat lead in the body, your doctor can help guide the decision to use a medicine to treat lead in the body. Always discuss with your provider any medicines you are taking or are considering taking, both prescribed and purchased over-the-counter.

Protecting Your Family from Lead Exposure

Have your home's paint and water tested if:

- You live in a home built before 1978
- You think you are being exposed to lead

What You Can Do Today

- Run your cold water until noticeably colder to the touch to flush out any lead that may have been absorbed from old pipes.
- Use only cold water out of the tap for cooking, especially for preparing baby formula. Let it run until it feels distinctly colder to the touch.
- If you have lead in your water, consider investing in a home water treatment device or alternative water sources. Make sure the water treatment device is NSF International approved to remove lead.



If you suspect your home has lead hazards, you can take immediate steps to protect your family:

- Clean up paint chips immediately. If you rent, notify your landlord of peeling or chipping paint.
- Clean floors, window frames, window sills, and other surfaces weekly. Afterwards, thoroughly rinse sponges and mop heads.
- Wash children's hands often, especially before they eat and before nap time and bed time.
- Keep play areas clean.
- Have everyone remove shoes at the entry of the house.
- Keep children from chewing windowsills or other painted surfaces.
- If you work in a job with known or suspected lead exposures, take necessary steps to eliminate exposure of family members by practicing lead safe behaviors – leave contaminated work clothes at work and wash immediately before coming in contact with family members at home.
- Have your home tested for lead during home renovations.



Resources Where You Can Get More Information on Lead

Environmental Protection Agency
www.epa.gov/lead

Centers for Disease Control
www.cdc.gov/nceh/lead/

denverhealth.org

