



U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development • Office of Healthy Homes and Lead Hazard Control

# Lead



*“Despite progress, lead poisoning remains one of the top childhood environmental health problems today.”*

*President’s Task Force on Environmental Health Risks and Safety Risks to Children*

## Did you know...

- Many homes built before 1978 have lead-based paint?
- 24 million homes in the United States have peeling or chipping lead-based paint or high levels of lead in dust?
- Infants, children under six, and pregnant women should have their blood tested for lead?
- In the United States, children from low-income families are eight times more likely to get lead poisoned?

## What is it?

Lead is a toxic metal used in a variety of products and materials. When lead is absorbed into the body, it can cause damage to the brain and other vital organs, like the kidneys, nerves, and blood. Some symptoms of lead poisoning may include headaches, stomachaches, nausea, tiredness, and irritability. Lead can also harm children without causing any obvious symptoms.

Both inside and outside the home, deteriorated lead-paint releases its lead, which then mixes with household dust and soil. Children can become lead poisoned by putting their hands or other lead-contaminated objects into their mouths, by eating paint chips found in homes with peeling or flaking lead-based paint, and from playing in lead-contaminated soil.

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**In homes built before 1978, treat peeling paint as a lead hazard unless proven otherwise.**



## What can you do?

### 1. If your home was built before 1978:

- Mop smooth floors (using a damp mop) weekly to control dust.
- Vacuum carpets and upholstery to remove dust, preferably using a vacuum with a HEPA filter or a “higher efficiency” collection bag.
- Take off shoes when entering the house.
- Pick up loose paint chips carefully with a paper towel; wipe the surface clean with a *wet* paper towel.
- Take precautions to avoid creating lead dust when remodeling, renovating, or maintaining your home.
- Have it checked for lead hazards by a lead professional (including the soil).

### 2. For your child:

- Frequently wash your child’s hands and toys to reduce exposure.
- Use cold tap water for drinking and cooking.
- Avoid using home remedies (such as *arzacón*, *greta*, *pay-loo-ah*, or *litargirio*) and cosmetics (such as *kohl* or *alkohl*) that contain lead.
- Have your child’s blood lead level tested at age 1 and 2. Children from 3 to 6 years of age should have their blood tested, if they have not been tested before and:
  - They live in or regularly visit a house built before 1950;
  - They live in or regularly visit a house built before 1978 with on-going or recent renovations or remodeling; or
  - They have a sibling or playmate who has or did have lead poisoning.

## For more information...

Visit HUD’s website at [www.hud.gov/offices/lead](http://www.hud.gov/offices/lead) for more information about addressing health hazards in homes or to learn if HUD has a Healthy Homes program in your community. From HUD’s website, you can download a copy of “Help Yourself to A Healthy Home” for more practical steps you can take to make your home a lead-safe home.

## Other Federal Resources

**U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Office of Healthy Homes and Lead Hazard Control**  
[www.hud.gov/offices/lead](http://www.hud.gov/offices/lead) or call (202) 755-1785

**The National Lead Information Center**  
(800) 424-LEAD (5323)  
[www.epa.gov/lead/pubs/nlic.htm](http://www.epa.gov/lead/pubs/nlic.htm)

**Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)**  
[www.cdc.gov/nceh/lead](http://www.cdc.gov/nceh/lead)

**Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)**  
[www.epa.gov/lead](http://www.epa.gov/lead)

**U.S. Department of Labor, Occupational Safety & Health Administration**  
[www.osha.gov/SLTC/lead](http://www.osha.gov/SLTC/lead)

**U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC)**  
[www.cpsc.gov](http://www.cpsc.gov) or call (800) 638-2772

**Dust created by opening and closing windows is a common lead hazard.**



Photo by: January E. Jones, Improving Kids’ Environment