



MDwise

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Lead Poisoning: Should I Have My Child Tested?

Screening, or testing, your child for lead poisoning can help prevent serious health problems.

Lead poisoning happens when your child breathes or swallows too much lead. Lead is a metal that is sometimes found in food, dust, paint, and water. Many homes built before 1978 may have lead-based paint.

A child may swallow lead by eating chips of old paint in dust or soil or chewing on objects painted with lead-based paint. Too much lead in the body is especially bad for children ages 6 years and younger. This is because their brains are developing quickly and their bodies absorb lead at a higher rate. It can slow a child's growth and cause:

- Lack of energy, and loss of appetite.
- Brain or nerve damage.
- Learning or behavior problems, like being hyperactive or aggressive.

The higher the amount of lead in the body, the more severe the symptoms are. Severe cases can cause seizures, paralysis, and coma.

Why is screening important?

Early symptoms of lead poisoning are easy to miss and may seem related to other conditions. So it is important to get your child tested.

Testing for lead in your child:

- Can find lead levels before they get too high.



- Can help your child get early treatment. This can prevent serious health problems from lead poisoning, such as brain damage.
- Is easy to do and does not cost much.

How is screening done?

Screening for lead in children can be done with a simple blood test.

When should children be tested?

Talk to your child's doctor about whether your child should be tested for lead. The doctor may ask questions about your family's living and home conditions. Whether testing is recommended may depend on where you live, how old your house is, and how likely it is that your child could be exposed to lead.

Children of all ages should be tested if they have been exposed to lead or if they have

symptoms that could be caused by lead poisoning.

How can you prevent lead poisoning?

In your home

- Have your home checked for lead if you think your home may have lead hazards. This is one of the most important things you can do to prevent lead poisoning. Call the National Lead Information Center at 1-800-424-LEAD (1-800-424-5323) for more information and a list of resources in your area.
- Wash your child's hands, bottles, toys, and pacifiers often.
- Do not let your child eat dirt or food that has fallen on the floor.
- Clean windowsills and door frames and floors often.
- Take off your shoes or wipe dirt off them before you go into your home.
- Do not scrape, sand, or burn painted wood unless you are sure it does not contain lead.

- If you know paint has lead in it, do not remove the paint yourself.
- If you have a hobby that uses lead, move your work space away from your home. Wash and change your clothes before you get in a car or return home.

Foods and food storage

- Feed your child foods that have enough iron and other vitamins and minerals. A healthy diet makes it harder for lead to get into the body.
- If you reuse plastic bags to store food, make sure the printing is on the outside.
- Never store food in an opened metal can, especially if the can was not made in the United States.
- Do not prepare, serve, or store food or drinks in ceramic pottery or crystal glasses unless you are sure they do not have lead.

Do you have any questions or concerns after reading this information? It's a good idea to write them down and take them to your next doctor visit.



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