# LEAD POISONING

#### *What are the Health and Safety Risks?*

**L**ead is a metal. Before 1978, lead was used in paint, water pipes, gasoline, pottery, consumer goods and objects. Millions of older homes still have lead paint and lead and copper solder water pipes, even though lead is no longer used in manufacturing paint or residential surface coatings in the United States. Because of diverse export and trade laws, there are industries in many countries outside the United States that still utilize lead components and ingredients during manufacturing of items such as toys, decorative art and jewelry, and cultural display pottery. Home hobbyists may use lead in stained glass making, fishing sinkers or lead shot, but are unaware of the range of risks the hobby has on their home from the transfer of dust from those hobbies onto their clothes, shoes, and car.

**If a home was built before 1978, paint on both the inside and outside could contain lead.** **Lead in outside paint can get into the soil around a home and can eventually be brought inside a home.**

#### ***Where Do Lead Risks Come From?***

The paint or varnish on walls, doors, and windows could have lead in it. Lead based paint was commonly used on surfaces that received a lot of wear. Areas included windows, doors and cabinets. Household dust from old, worn paint could contain lead. Drinking water could have lead in it from original or repaired plumbing.

Lead paint that is intact is not a direct hazard, but a potential one, if the surface starts to chip, peel, or chalk. Lead paint that peels, flakes, or is disturbed (for example, by sanding) is a health risk. To reduce lead poisoning, it is very important to advise a family to conduct regular paint assessments and maintenance routines when living in an older home. When hiring a contractor for painting or remodeling, federal law requires that up-to-date safety procedures be followed by certified contractors if lead based paint is present. A contractor must do this to prevent lead from being spread but homeowners living in their own home should be advised to use safe work practices to protect themselves and their family from lead hazards created by working with lead paint. A good resource for these practices can be found at the website for the EPA lead in renovation rule: <https://www.epa.gov/lead/renovation-repair-and-painting-program> .

Older houses are much more likely to have lead in various locations. Homes built before 1940 are most likely to have lead in both interior and exterior paint and possibly in any original plumbing to the house. If a family has young children, it is very important to consult with them to find out if their home has lead in it, especially if their home was built before 1978. There are certified and licensed lead risk assessors and lead based paint inspectors in each state and information on lead risks, assessments, and safe practices can be found at www.epa. gov/lead.

Why is Lead Dangerous?

Whether the lead-based paint is inside or outside the house, if it is not intact, it is dangerous. When lead paint starts to wear off, it creates lead dust or small paint chips. These can then settle into the soil outside the home. Inside, they can get on the floor, onto windows, or in places where children can touch them. Lead that is on the hands of young children can get into their bodies as children often put their hands, toys or other objects in their mouths. Lead can permanently damage a family member’s nervous system, including their brain. It can cause permanent learning and behavior problems. Lead poisoning is one of the most preventable health risks for children at home.

Children with lead exposure might not even look sick. A blood lead level test is the only way to know if a child has a high level of lead in his or her body. It is up to parents and health care providers to recommend and complete a blood lead screening tests on all children ages 0-6 years old to ensure that the family is fully aware and educated about the risk of lead from the community they live in. Contrary to the information in the media, lead exposure is not a zip code problem: families of all backgrounds and resources can be exposed to lead hazards at their day care, relatives, and friend’s homes where they spend significant amounts of time.



**What can you do to help the families**

**and communities you serve?**

*Actions for Living in a Healthy Home*

Family Health

For each family served, healthy homes stakeholders should:

* Encourage health screenings for blood lead levels in children of all ages but especially ages 1-6. This test is free at some clinics or health departments. It only takes a small blood sample to tell if a child has lead in their system.
  + Encourage families to facilitate frequent hand washing, especially before eating, using soap and water.
* Have the family consider feeding their children a healthy diet. Foods with vitamin C, calcium and iron can help lower the amount of lead the body takes in if exposed.

Healthy Housekeeping and Habits

For each family served, healthy homes stakeholders should:

* + Encourage families to wipe window sills and other surfaces with paper towels, warm water, and soap once a week and rinse well. Families should not allow children to chew or put their mouths on window sills or casings.
  + ******Keep cribs away from windowsills and walls that have deteriorated paint.
  + Suggest to them to wash work clothes separately and don’t mix them with the rest of the family’s laundry. Adult workers can often bring lead dust home on their clothing, skin, or shoes.
  + Inform them to test for lead first if their home was built before 1978, if a family plans to do any repair or remodeling. Also inform the family to:
* Never scrape, sand, or burn lead paint.
* Keep children and pregnant women away while the home is being remodeled.

If there is Lead in a Home

If lead paint is intact, the family should be instructed to consider leaving it in place and make sure it stays intact. If lead paint is deteriorated, the family should be encouraged to ask their local or state health department for a list of certified lead paint abatement companies or how to proceed safely on their own. If a home was built before 1978, there could also be lead contaminated soil and the family should be warned to avoid having their children playing near bare soil. The family might also consider placing ground covers or mulch, gravel, or plants to create a barrier in play areas.

##### If there is Lead Plumbing in a Home

##### If a family has lead water pipes, they should be warned to:

* Use cold water for cooking or drinking or making baby formula, or consider adding a water filter to the tap that will catch lead particals.
* Run the cold water faucet for a few minutes when they haven’t used their water for a few hours (or overnight). This clears out any water that was sitting in the pipes that could have collected lead or other metals.