

# Lead Safety 101: Keeping Your Family Safe from Lead

## WHAT IS LEAD?

Lead is a naturally occurring metal that can be found in all parts of our environment – the air, soil, water, and even inside our homes. With enough exposure, it can cause negative health impacts.

## WHAT ARE SOURCES OF LEAD EXPOSURE?

Within the home:

- Lead-based paints in older homes (built before 1978). *This is the most common source of lead exposure.*
- Drinking water from lead pipes, faucets, and plumbing fixtures (most common in homes built before 1986)
- Vintage and antique items (made before 1978) including jewelry and silverware
- Toys, most commonly including antiques (made before 1978) and others imported from other countries
- Spices, candies, and herbal remedies
- Cosmetics and ceremonial powders

Outside of the home:

- Soil
- Hazards from certain jobs and hobbies, including construction, manufacturing, renovation, and glasswork
- Air pollutants from industrial sources like waste incinerators, metals processing, and aviation gas used in piston engine aircrafts. Lead can also be released into the air from improper home renovation practices.

## WHO IS MOST AT RISK OF HEALTH IMPACTS FROM LEAD EXPOSURE?

**Children under age 6:** At this age, children's bodies are rapidly developing and more likely to take in lead if exposed. Young children also tend to put their hands or other objects into their mouths, causing lead ingestion. Lead exposure at this age can harm children's development.

**Pregnant people:** Lead exposure during pregnancy can hurt the baby's development, cause the child to have learning or behavior problems, and increase the risk for miscarriage or premature birth.

## CAN NON-PREGNANT ADULTS BE HARMED BY LEAD EXPOSURE?

After age 6, bodies do not absorb lead as easily, so exposure must be higher for health impacts to occur in non-pregnant adults compared to young children. Adults at risk for lead poisoning are those in certain industries likely to cause high levels of lead exposure, like manufacturing and construction.

## WHAT ARE POSSIBLE HEALTH EFFECTS OF LEAD EXPOSURE?

### In children under age 6:

- Damage to the brain and nervous system
- Slowed growth and development
- Learning and behavior problems
- Hearing and speech problems

### In pregnant people:

- Increased risk for miscarriage
- Cause the baby to be born too early or too small
- Hurt the baby's brain, kidneys, and nervous system
- Cause the child to have learning or behavior problems

### In workers in high-risk industries:

- From high exposure over a short period of time:
  - Metallic taste
  - Abdominal pain, nausea, vomiting
  - Diarrhea or constipation
  - Dehydration, headache, exhaustion, irritability, weakness
  - Loss of memory and appetite
  - Pain or tingling in your hands or feet
- From high exposure over a long period of time:
  - Decreased lung function
  - Increased risk of high blood pressure, cardiovascular problems, and kidney damage
  - Bone or tooth loss
  - Increased infections in general
  - Fertility problems in both men and women

## HOW CAN I REDUCE MY FAMILY'S RISK OF LEAD EXPOSURE?

### In homes:

- Have your home tested for lead paint in homes built before 1978, and have it removed by a professional if lead is found. *Do not renovate without a professional.* This can release more lead dust into the air.
- Have your drinking water tested for lead, especially in homes built before 1986.
- Do not let your children play with toys made before 1978.
- Do not let your children use other antique products, like jewelry and silverware made before 1978.
- Buy spices locally, rather than overseas. Domestic products have stricter safety standards and are more likely to have been screened for heavy metals.
- Stay up to date on food and product recalls at [FDA.gov](http://FDA.gov) and [CPSC.gov](http://CPSC.gov).

### Outside of home:

- Do not let kids play in bare soil.
- Teach kids not to eat soil.
- Have kids and adults wash hands and remove shoes when returning inside.
- Move play areas away from the sides of the home, where lead from paint on the home can create lead dust and enter the soil.
- Cover soil with mulch, wood chips, grass, inches of clean soil, or other materials

**HOW CAN I FIND OUT IF LEAD EXPOSURE HAS OCCURRED?**

Blood testing can determine if lead exposure has occurred. Talk to your child's pediatrician to request testing. If you are pregnant, blood lead testing is provided as part of prenatal care. If you are a non-pregnant adult and would like to be tested, talk to your doctor about risk factors, like if you have a high-risk job like manufacturing or construction, to determine if testing is needed.

**Resources:**

1.

**FIND A HOME LEAD INSPECTOR**

2.

**CDC LEAD SAFETY INFO**

3.

**EPA LEAD SAFETY INFO**

4.

**REQUEST WATER LEAD TEST KIT  
(Durham residents with homes built  
before 1986) | Call 919-560-1200**

5.

**DURHAM COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF  
PUBLIC HEALTH LEAD SAFETY INFO**

1. Find a home lead inspector: <https://schs.dph.ncdhhs.gov/lead/accredited.cfm>
2. CDC lead safety info: [CDC.gov/lead](https://www.cdc.gov/lead)
3. EPA lead safety info: [EPA.gov/lead](https://www.epa.gov/lead)
4. Request water lead test kit: <https://www.durhamnc.gov/5108/Lead-Safe-Durham>
5. Durham County Department of Public Health lead safety info: [DCoPublicHealth.org/Lead](https://www.durhamnc.gov/5108/Lead-Safe-Durham)