

# LEAD CAN BE DANGEROUS

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## **LEAD CAN BE DANGEROUS**

Lead has long been recognized as a harmful environmental pollutant. There are many ways in which humans are exposed to lead and most of the time we may not even be aware of it. Airborne lead enters the body when an individual breathes in lead particles or swallows some lead dust. Until recently, the most important airborne source of lead was automobile exhaust. Since 1975, there has been a 95 percent reduction in the use of lead in gasoline due to the Environmental Protection Agency's Phasedown Program and the replacement of older cars with newer cars that require the use of unleaded gasoline. Seeking out sources of lead in the household and surrounding areas can be crucial in safeguarding your family members, especially children and pets. It has now been determined that the effects from lead paint, household dust, lead crystal and some imported pottery.

Children are considered to be at the greatest risk of exposure because they have such intimate contact with the environment. Their faster metabolism causes them to eat more for their body weight and to breathe faster.

Children also tend to play and breathe closer to the ground where lead dust concentrates. They are also likely to put their hands in their mouths, which can bring lead just directly into their bodies.

Parents can take several steps to help protect their children from the effects of lead within the home environment. Cover peeling or exposed paint with wood paneling or vinyl wallpaper. Stripping off the paint will release more lead into the environment, and a new coat of paint can itself peel, re-exposing the paint beneath it.

Also, lead and lead salts are toxic to pets. Pets are naturally curious and are prone to claw, scratch and pick at peeling materials. To minimize the risk to your pet, watch what they pick up in their mouths! These toxic lead salts can be found in such common things as insecticides and linoleum.

Be careful when doing any kind of remodeling such as removing old paint, replacing linoleum on floors, counters, etc. Keep pets and children away from work sites and building materials. Properly dispose of any leaded materials and remove them promptly from the premises. Know the possible signs of lead poisoning, vomiting, diarrhea, abdominal pain, lack of appetite, irritability, listlessness, hysteria or convulsions. When a pet shows gastrointestinal as well as neurological symptoms, lead poisoning could be the culprit and you should contact the vet as soon as possible.

Many water mains are still made of lead, so household water should be tested for lead content. If lead is present in the water, allow it to run for a few minutes before using it. Use cold or bottled water to prepare foods or infant's formula because hot water tends to leech more lead. Iron deficiency anemia is a common problem among one and two year olds that predisposes them to eating nonfood substances and causes them to absorb more of the lead taken into their bodies.

If lead exposure is suspected, consult your health department about appropriate removal and

clean-up procedures. Also, people who may have been exposed to lead or lead dust recently should have the lead levels in their blood tested by their doctor or local health department.