

Common Sources of Lead

Lead is still part of our world today. It is found in the air, soil, dust, and the paint of some homes or buildings built before 1978. Exposure to lead can cause serious health problems. The good news is that lead poisoning can be prevented. This fact sheet explains common sources of lead in the home and how to avoid them.

Lead-Based Paint and Lead Dust

Lead dust is currently the main source of lead exposure among children. Household dust can contain lead from cracked, chipped or peeling lead-based paint and tracked contaminated soil. Lead dust can also be created during home remodeling, renovation projects, or when lead-based paint is not removed safely. Lead is no longer in new paint, but it may still be found in older homes built before 1978. Very small amounts of dust containing lead can cause a child's blood lead level to increase.

Tips That Can Help Reduce Lead in Your Home

- Keep your home as dust-free as possible by cleaning regularly. Your house can look clean and still have lead in it.
 - **Use a cleaning solution made with household detergent and the Wet Washing method to clean** window wells, sills and floors. Mix detergent according to the directions on the container. Use two separate buckets and sets of disposable rags or paper towels - one for the wash step with cleaning solution and one for the rinse step with clean water.
 - Wet wash windows often. Loose paint and dust can build up inside and under the window area.
 - Do not use your household vacuum to clean up paint chips or lead dust. The filter in it is not designed to pick up and hold small pieces of lead. Regular household vacuums will spread lead dust into the air. Look for special vacuums that have HEPA certified filters to clean up paint chips and lead dust.
- Wash your child's hands with soap and water before eating, naps, and bedtime.
- Wash bottles, teething rings, and toys with soap and water.
- Windows are a common source of dust containing lead, as the friction of opening and closing windows can cause tiny amounts of lead-based paint to rub off. Do not allow children to play or eat around window areas in older homes.
- Keep windows closed on windy days so that lead-contaminated soil does not get into the house.
- Painting over chipping or peeling lead-based paint does not make it safe! You must first **safely** remove chipping or peeling lead-based paint before repainting. Read [Steps to LEAD SAFE Renovation, Repair and Painting \(https://www.epa.gov/sites/default/files/2013-11/documents/steps_0.pdf\)](https://www.epa.gov/sites/default/files/2013-11/documents/steps_0.pdf) to learn how to safely remove chipped or peeling paint and reduce lead hazard when renovating your home.
- If you are renting, there may be local ordinances that require the paint to be maintained in good condition. Check with your municipality to find out about local rules.

Soil

Soil can be contaminated with lead, especially in areas near old homes, buildings or fences. As the result of past use of leaded gasoline, lead can also be found in the soil near major roadways or intersections.

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- Don't let your child eat outside on bare soil areas, eat dirt, or play next to the house or street where bare soil is present.
- Cover bare soil (any soil you can see) with grass, mulch, shrubs, or another kind of durable ground cover.
- Keep washable rugs at all of the entrances to your home. Wash these rugs separately from other items, and run a rinse cycle once before using the washer again.
- Take your shoes off at the door so soil and dust are not tracked into the house.

Food and Spices

Some spices and foods are more likely to contain lead. It is not legal to add lead to food that will be sold in the United States, but lead has been found in some foods and spices. Purchase spices sold in individual containers rather than bulk bins. Use spices purchased in the United States instead of spices purchased in other countries. Foods and spices that have been found to contain lead more commonly than other foods include:

- Imported candy
- Coriander
- Turmeric
- Chili powder
- Curry powder
- Dried insects
- Seven spices
- Cloves
- Anise seeds
- Whole chili

Plants usually do not absorb lead unless there is a large amount of lead in the soil.

- Wash fruits and vegetables before eating to clean off any lead dust that may have settled on the food.
- Remove the outer leaves of leafy green vegetables.
- Store food in glass, stainless steel or sturdy plastic, or ceramic that is lead-free. Some antique, handmade, and imported ceramics may contain lead in the glaze. Do not use these ceramics or leaded crystal for food storage.
- Plant gardens away from the house, garage, fence, or other structures covered with chipping paint.

Water

Lead can enter drinking water as it passes through household plumbing systems. Lead levels in your water are more likely to be high if your home or water system has lead pipes or copper pipes with lead solder. Plumbing put in before 1930 may contain lead pipes. Plumbing installed before 1986 may contain lead-based solder in the copper joints in the water supply system. Brass faucets and ball valves may also contain lead.

The only way to know if your water (or other lead source) has lead in it is to have it tested by a certified lab. Contact a [Minnesota Department of Health accredited laboratory](https://eldo.web.health.state.mn.us/public/accreditedlabs/labsearch.seam) (<https://eldo.web.health.state.mn.us/public/accreditedlabs/labsearch.seam>) to get a sample container and instructions on how to submit a sample.

If you think you may have lead in your water:

- Do not cook, drink or make baby formula with water from the hot water faucet. Hot water dissolves more lead than cold water. If you need hot water, heat cold water from the tap or the refrigerator.
- Always use cold water for cooking or drinking. If the water has not been used for six or more hours, let the cold water run for a couple of minutes or until there is a temperature change.

Traditional or Cultural Medicine and Cosmetics

Some traditional or cultural medicine and cosmetics contain lead and should not be used. They are often found in items purchased from outside of the United States. Please talk to your doctor if you are using any of the following remedies or cosmetics that may contain lead:

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|-------------|-----------|---------------|----------------|------------|
| ▪ Alarcon | ▪ Cora | ▪ Kohl | ▪ Bentonite | ▪ Calabash |
| ▪ Alkohl | ▪ Greta | ▪ Liga | clay | ▪ Thanaka |
| ▪ Azarcon | ▪ Farouk | ▪ Lozeena | ▪ Sindoor | ▪ Pooja |
| ▪ Bali Gali | ▪ Ghasard | ▪ Pay-loo-lah | ▪ Kumkum | powder |
| ▪ Bint al | ▪ Kandu | ▪ Surma | ▪ Tiro | ▪ Rangoli |
| Zahab | | | ▪ Rasa Shastra | Vibuti |

Other Sources of Lead

Lead Exposure That Occurred in Another Country

Individuals who have recently moved from or spent time in another country may have a greater risk for lead exposure, depending on the environmental regulations and sources of exposure in that country. Some countries have stricter regulations about lead in foods and products than others. Lead paint and is still allowed in some countries; leaded gasoline for cars was used in some countries as late as 2021.

Lead Exposure from Work and Hobbies

Adults can be exposed to lead through certain jobs or hobbies where lead is used, such as construction or lead smelting; radiator or auto repair shops; recycling batteries; refinishing antiques; working in shooting ranges; and making ammunition or fishing sinkers. Lead dust can be carried home in their car or on their clothes, shoes, skin and hair and can be passed on to children and other family members.

This is known as [Take-home lead](https://www.health.state.mn.us/communities/environment/lead/fs/takehome.html)

(<https://www.health.state.mn.us/communities/environment/lead/fs/takehome.html>). Adults with jobs or hobbies where lead is used should shower and change clothes and shoes before coming home.

Clothes worn at work should be washed separately from other clothing. Run a rinse cycle once before using the washer again.

Pica Behavior

Pica is when an adult or child chews or ingests non-food items such as soil, clay, or pieces of housing material such as paint chips, drywall, or baseboards. If pica behavior is identified, it should be managed to prevent exposure to substances containing lead.

Special Amulets, Jewelry, Keys, Fishing Sinkers and Toys

There are other items containing lead that Children may put in their mouths. Many items that are commonly found to have lead are metallic, white, bright yellow, or red. Some of these items may include:

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- Jewelry and clothing charms
- Special amulets that may be worn for religious purposes, to ward off evil, protection or bring good luck. They may have different names, such as Tabeez or Tabiz, and may not be considered jewelry by families.
- Key chains or keys
- Fishing sinkers
- Chalk
- Imported, antique, painted or recalled children's toy blocks, musical instruments, and toys
- Clay or painted pottery

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English

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