

The Effects of Lead Exposure

What is lead?

Lead is a metal found in the earth's crust. Burning fossil fuels, mining, and manufacturing has caused it to become more widespread in the environment. Lead is in the air, soil, and water, and may be in our homes and workplaces. Although lead was banned in paint and gasoline in the U.S., paint in homes built before 1978 may contain lead.

How are people exposed to lead?

- Working in the construction industry, in an auto repair shop, or living with someone who does.
- Breathing in dust from areas where lead-based paints are deteriorating.
- Eating paint chips.
- Having contact with pottery, ammunition, cosmetics, toys, or candies that come from other countries. These may contain lead.
- Using health-care products or home remedies that contain lead.
- Eating food or drinking water containing lead.

How can lead affect my health?

- Breathing or swallowing lead can affect your nervous system.
- High levels of lead can damage the brain and kidneys in adults or children and cause death.
- Lead exposure can cause learning disabilities, lower intelligence, and behavior problems in children.



Worker wears protective mask and suit while preparing surface to avoid exposure to lead-based paint.

For questions or more information:

Texas Department of State Health Services
Environmental Surveillance and Toxicology Branch:
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- For pregnant women, high levels of lead exposure may cause miscarriage.
- For men, high levels of exposure to lead can damage sperm production.
- Lead exposure might affect your blood pressure and could cause anemia.

How can I reduce the risks of exposure to lead?

- If you work with lead, shower and change your clothes and shoes before going home or getting into your car.
- Remove shoes or wipe them on a doormat before going inside.
- Wash your clothes separately from the family laundry if you work with lead.
- At home, look for chipping paint. Eating paint chips or chewing on painted surfaces could harm your child's health.
- Wash your child's hands before eating and sleeping.
- Use a wet mop on floors and window sills when cleaning at home.
- Vacuum using a high-efficiency particulate air (HEPA) filter.
- If you are renovating, test for lead before you scrape or sand painted surfaces.
- Children and pregnant women should not be in places built before 1978 during renovation.

How can I find out if I've been exposed to lead?

There is a simple blood test to measure lead exposure. Ask your doctor.

For more information:

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<https://dshs.texas.gov/lead/default.shtm>

<https://www.cdc.gov/nceh/lead/>

<https://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/toxfaqs/tfacts13.pdf>

