

Ask the Pediatrician: What can parents do to prevent exposure to lead?

January 10 2022, by Dr. Jennifer A. Sample and Dr. Lauren Zajac



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Q: What can I do to protect my family from lead exposure? Should I have my children tested?

A: Protecting children from exposure to lead is important to lifelong good health. Even low levels of lead in the [blood](#) have been shown to affect IQ, ability to pay attention and academic achievement.

The most important step that parents, pediatricians and others can take is to prevent lead exposure before it occurs. Here are some simple steps to reduce lead exposure in your [home](#):

— Talk to your local health department about testing paint and dust in your home for lead if you live in a home built before 1978.

— Make sure children are removed from areas of home renovation activities until the area is completed. Common home renovation activities like sanding, cutting and demolition can create hazardous lead dust and chips by disturbing lead-based paint. These can be harmful to adults and children.

— Renovation activities should be performed by certified renovators who are trained by EPA-approved training providers to follow lead-safe work practices.

— If you see paint chips or dust in windowsills or on floors because of peeling paint, clean these areas regularly with a wet mop.

— Wipe your feet on mats before entering the home, especially if you work in occupations where lead is used. Removing your shoes when you are entering the home is a good practice to control lead.

— Remove recalled toys and toy jewelry from children. Stay informed about recalls by visiting the Consumer Product Safety Commission's website. Your pediatrician can screen your child for [lead exposure](#) risk factors. Based on risk factors identified, they may recommend a [blood test](#) to measure the level of lead in your child's blood. Usually, there are

no obvious signs or symptoms if a child is exposed to lead. A blood test is an easy way to find out.

Until 2012, children were identified as having a blood lead level of concern if the test result was 10 or more micrograms per deciliter of lead in blood. Prior to 2012, the blood lead test results for children with levels below 10 may or may not have been reported to parents.

Experts now know that there is no safe lead level. Because of this, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has lowered the reference level for blood lead testing in children. The level is based on the U.S. population of children ages 1-5 years who are in the top 2.5% of children when tested for lead in their blood. This number is used to monitor the progress of lead poisoning prevention in the U.S. The current CDC reference level is 3.5 micrograms per deciliter of lead in blood for children.

What has not changed is the need to find the source of lead in children with all elevated blood lead levels so that the exposure can be stopped. Parents should talk with their pediatrician about possible sources that could lead to high blood lead levels.

These new recommendations do not change the recommendation that chelation therapy be considered when a child is found with a test result of 45 micrograms per deciliter of lead or more in the blood.

If you're concerned about blood lead levels in your [children](#), talk with your pediatrician. Your regional Pediatric Environmental Health Specialty Unit have staff who can also talk with pediatricians and families about concerns over environmental toxins.

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