

What is Lead Poisoning?

Lead poisoning has been identified as the number one preventable environmental health threat to children in the United States. The leading cause of childhood lead poisoning in the U.S. today is the ingestion of lead-based paint and the associated contaminated dust and soil found in or around older houses.

Because lead poisoning often occurs with no obvious symptoms, it frequently goes unrecognized. **Young children under the age of 6 are most at risk of becoming lead poisoned.** Because children are growing, and their brains are developing so rapidly, even low levels of lead can potentially cause permanent brain and nervous system damage, learning and behavioral problems, as well as result in a lower IQ.

Other symptoms of lead poisoning may include headaches, stomachaches, nausea, tiredness, and irritability. There have been some rare cases of lead poisoning causing convulsions, coma and even death.

The mission of Denver Department of Public Health & Environment's (DDPHE) Lead Poisoning Prevention Program is to promote healthy and lead-safe environments for Denver's residents – with an emphasis on the impacts to children – through public education, outreach, and case investigations, and work to eliminate childhood lead poisoning by preventing environmental exposures to lead.

How do I know if my child has lead poisoning?

A blood test is the only way to know if your child is lead poisoned.

Most children with lead poisoning do not look or act sick, and the symptoms are not particularly obvious.

Ask your doctor or health care provider about a blood lead test if you think your child may be at risk.

Your child may be at risk if:

- He/She lives in or spends significant time in a home built before 1978. Pre-1978 homes often contain lead-based paint
- If the paint on your house is in poor condition (interior or exterior)
- You are renovating/remodeling your home built before 1978 where lead-based paint may become disturbed
- You cook with pottery that is imported from another country
- You use cosmetics or spices from another country

A common source of lead poisoning is children coming into contact with deteriorated house paint (the kind you might find on an old wooden house window) and then putting their fingers in their mouths or inhaling the accompanying lead dust.

Also, it's important to note:

Lead in dust is invisible and this dust can be very hazardous to children. Be sure to regularly wet wipe windowsill or floor surfaces below old painted windows that may be rubbing against each other creating dust, and regularly wipe floors under and near old painted doors that may be rubbing against frames causing friction and creating lead dust.

Other sources of lead exposure may include:

- Bare soil contaminated from chipping, peeling, or flaking paint.
- Some imported toys or other consumer products. These are much less likely than lead exposure caused by deteriorated lead-based paint, but the following link is a good source to research any recent recalls because of lead: <http://www.cpsc.gov/en/Recalls/>
- Tamarind, chili powder, and chili-coated candies from other countries: <http://www.cdc.gov/nceh/lead/tips/candy.htm>
- Handmade or imported pottery and imported low-cost dishes
- Home remedies from another country, such as Azarcon and Greta. Some ayurvedic medicine products may contain other harmful poisons like mercury or arsenic, as well as lead: <http://www.cdc.gov/nceh/lead/tips/folkmedicine.htm>

What can I do to prevent lead poisoning?

Remember that lead poisoning is preventable, and you can take some simple steps to keep your family safe.

1. Keep children away from chipping, peeling or flaking house paint, if the structure was built before 1978. If you live in a pre-1978 home, know that it may contain lead-based paint. Learn to work lead-safe if you're going to disturb the paint and insist that any hired contractor is certified to do the work safely, per the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) Renovation, Repair, and Painting Rule.**

**EPA's Lead Renovation, Repair and Painting Rule (RRP Rule) requires that firms performing renovation, repair, and painting projects that disturb lead-based paint in homes, child care facilities and pre-schools built before 1978 have their firm certified by EPA (or an EPA authorized state), use certified renovators who are trained by EPA-approved training providers and follow lead-safe work practices. (<https://www.epa.gov/lead/lead-renovation-repair-and-painting-program>)

2. Wash children's hands frequently and regularly wipe down high contact areas like painted windowsills where children may put their hands or mouths.
3. Monitor the condition of your home's paint and move to action if the paint is in a deteriorated condition. If you rent, tell your landlord about chipping or peeling paint. Clean

up paint chips with a wet paper towel and place them in the trash.

4. Don't sand or dry scrape paint in old homes. You could create lead dust that is potentially hazardous to children.
5. Don't let children eat dirt. Don't track dirt inside; remove shoes when entering the house.
6. Limit your child's consumption of Mexican candies, especially if they contain tamarind or chili.
7. Do not give your child home remedies (like Azarcon or Greta) from other countries. Talk to your doctor or pharmacist.
8. Do not use imported pots to cook or store food (like Mexican bean pots), unless you are sure they are lead-safe.
9. Do not use cosmetics from another county, unless you are certain that they are lead-safe.
10. Don't bring lead home from your work. For example, if you work in construction, are a house painter, or otherwise potentially exposed to lead, learn to work lead-safe and don't bring it home with you. If you do work in these industries, a safe practice is to change your shoes and clothes before you get into your car as to not track any lead dust with you on your way home.

Additional Local Resources

There are multiple government agencies and community-based organizations in Denver working to prevent childhood lead poisoning and DDPHE partners with many of them. Links to websites and additional information on specific programs are listed below:

- **U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)** - The EPA enforces regulations for the purpose of protecting human health and the environment, including lead poisoning prevention.
- **U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)** - HUD seeks to create strong, sustainable, inclusive communities and quality affordable homes for all.
- **Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE)** - CDPHE regulates environmental health and safety and compiles vital statistics for the state of Colorado. CDPHE tracks blood lead tests and seeks to reduce cases of lead poisoning in the state.
- **Denver Economic Development & Opportunity (DEDO)** - DEDO seeks to advance economic prosperity in the City and County of Denver.
- **Denver Public Health (DPH)** - Denver Public Health provides a wide range of services that promote, improve and protect the health and well-being of the residents of Denver.
- **Denver Urban Renewal Authority (DURA)** DURA provides a variety of housing rehabilitation programs to help qualifying Denver residents live in safe and comfortable housing.