

Fact Sheet: Lead, your health and the environment

Lead and your health

Historically, lead was widely used because it was cheap and its properties enhanced certain products.

Exposure to lead is linked with harmful effects on many organs and bodily functions. People of all ages may be harmed by lead but the risks are greatest for pregnant women, infants and children. Factors which influence the symptoms and health effects include the age and health status of the person, the amount of lead, and the duration of exposure.

It is well established that elevated blood lead levels can have harmful effects including anaemia, kidney problems and neurological or developmental effects, particularly in children.

If you suspect that you or your family have been exposed to lead, visit your doctor for further advice. For more information regarding the health effects of lead please refer to the NHMRC Statement and Information Paper on the Health Effects of Lead at www.nhmrc.gov.au/health-topics/lead-blood-levels.

Who is most at risk?

People who work in jobs that involve lead may be at risk and may bring lead dust home on their clothes. Home renovators or people using lead in hobbies may also be at risk.

People living near lead-based industries may be more exposed than others. However, paint and dust in older buildings can also be a problem. Before 1970, house paints contained higher levels of lead – lead levels in paint are now very low.

How lead enters the body

Lead is present in old paint, industrial and pre-2002 car exhaust fallout, building materials and products we use daily. When small amounts of lead are frequently breathed in or eaten, they can build up in the body and cause health problems.

What you can do

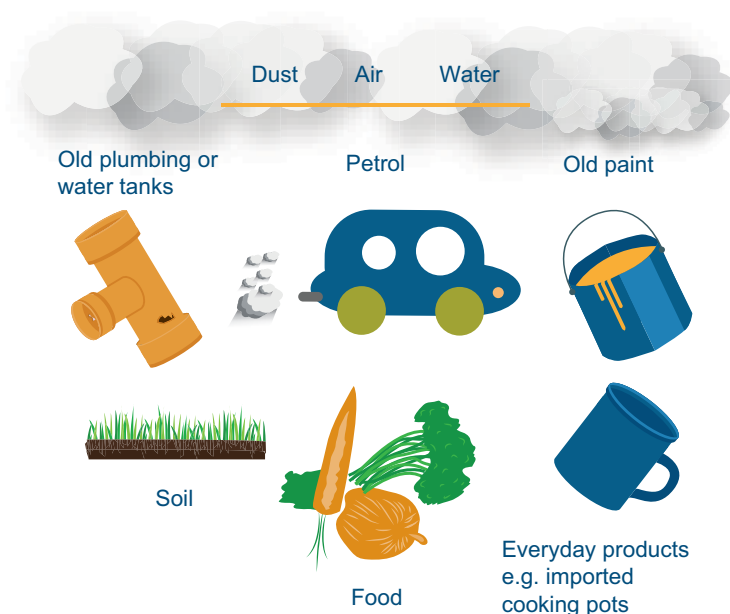
Test for lead

Find out where the sources of lead are likely to be and how to deal with them safely. Test to ensure home-grown eggs and veggies are lead-free (see 'Where to get advice' section).

Reduce dust

- **Do not** sweep. Instead, wet-wash floors, stairs and windows with detergent, then rinse with clean water.
- Seal cracks, cavities, ceiling roses and wall vents to stop dust accumulating or leaking into rooms.
- Professionals should clean ceiling cavities with a HEPA vacuum cleaner – **do not** do this work yourself.

Potential sources of lead contamination



Keep play areas safe

- Move play areas away from bare soil.
- Grow grass or plants in bare areas of dirt.
- Clean dummies, toys and pets.
- Provide clean sand in sandpits and cover when not in use.

Lead-based paint

- Check for peeling or deteriorating paint in older homes.
- Block holes in roof spaces and cover small areas of peeling paint with furniture as short-term measures.
- Cover old lead paint rather than remove it unsafely.
- Hire a trained and qualified lead-safe worker to remove old paint – if you do remove it yourself, take full precautions (see 'Where to get advice' section).

Home renovations

If you are renovating a house built before 1997, plan how to do the work and how to protect your family and neighbours, including cleaning up and disposing of waste. Planning can save time and money.

- Pregnant women, children and pets should move out during renovations until after the clean-up.
- **Do not** use blowtorches or heat guns on lead paint as they create fumes containing lead.
- Power sanders produce large amounts of lead dust – wet surfaces to be sanded and seal off work areas with plastic sheeting to retain lead paint dust.
- Use a respirator with a P1 (dust) or P2 (dust and fumes) filter and coveralls to prevent

exposure to lead dust or fumes – simple paper masks may not protect you from fine dust due to poor facial fit.

- Dispose of waste in sealed plastic bags and clean up with a wet mop and water before pregnant women, children and pets return.
- **Do not** burn painted wood.
- **Do not** use methylene chloride strippers.

Protect yourself from lead at work

- Wash hands, face and hair, and change clothes before you get in the car or come home from work.
- Provide clean sand in sandpits and cover when not in use.
- Do not smoke or carry cigarettes in the workplace.
- Wash hands and face before smoking.
- Wash work clothes separately from other clothes and rinse the washing machine afterwards.

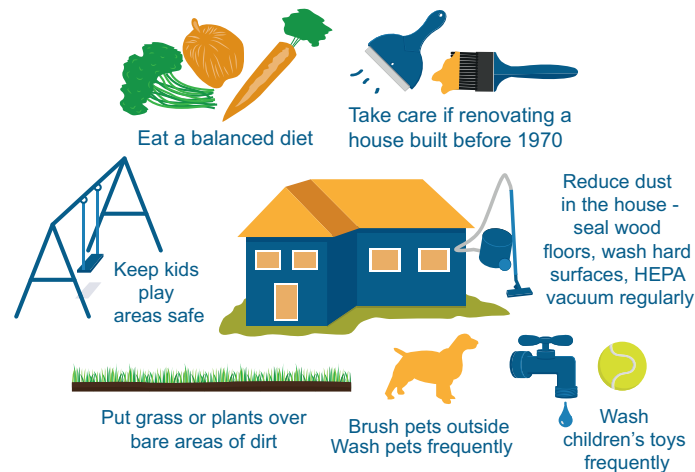
Where to get advice

For information on lead and the environment call the NSW EPA's Environment Line on 131 555 or visit the NSW EPA lead safety webpage: www.epa.nsw.gov.au/lead.

For further information and advice about protecting yourself from lead, testing for lead and removal services and guidelines for safe home renovation, call The LEAD Group on 1800 626 026 or (02) 9716 0014. Lead test kits are available from the Lead Group (www.leadworld.com/shop) and most hardware stores.

Ask your doctor for information about blood tests and the effects of lead on your health.

Preventing lead hazards at home



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Every effort has been made to ensure that the information in this document is accurate at the time of publication. However, as appropriate, readers should obtain independent advice before making any decision based on this information.

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