

## Fact Sheet: Lead safety at home



### 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 unborn babies, 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](http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/health-topics/lead-blood-levels).

### Lead in your home

Find out where the sources of lead could be around your home and how to deal with them safely. For example, dust can penetrate soft furnishings like carpets and lounge chairs, curtains, and your baby's soft toys; it can build up over years in your garden soil

or in your ceiling, especially if you live near industries or busy roads. It can remain as a paint coating on your doors, walls, window sills and children's furniture such as cots and playpens.

### Mopping and wet-wiping

Wet-mop hard floor surfaces and wet wipe benchtops, window sills, kitchens, furniture and toys using a high-phosphate detergent (e.g. liquid sugar soap). If you live in an older home or live close to a lead industry, mop and wet-wipe, and hose front steps and verandahs at least once a week.

Sweeping/dusting are not recommended as this may release dust into the air.

### Vacuuming

Ordinary vacuum cleaners do not filter fine lead particles. Use a vacuum cleaner with a high-efficiency particulate air (HEPA) filter, or use a ducted vacuum cleaner. If these are not available, vacuum when young children are not present, allow time for dust to settle, and wet-wipe before children return.

### Old carpets

Remove old carpets as they are much harder to clean than hard surfaces. Carpets may need to be thrown out if contaminated by renovations. If removing carpets, wet them first and roll them inwards, then wrap them in plastic. Wet-mop the area once the carpet is removed.

#### Housekeeping tips to help stop lead contamination



## Pets

Animal coats may harbour considerable amounts of dust. Brush pets outside and ensure that children wash their hands after patting them. Wash animal bedding once per week.

## Laundry

Regularly wash children's toys and blankets using a high-phosphate detergent, and rinse well. Do not shake or leave dusty clothes near children. Wash work clothes separately and use a phosphate detergent. Rinse the machine after the wash to prevent contaminating other clothes.

## Lead-related occupations and hobbies

Lead is used in construction and demolition industries, panel beating, motor repair trades, mining, smelting, etc. Workers in these occupations can inadvertently bring lead home on their clothes and contaminate their car and house. If possible, leave contaminated work clothes at work or place them in a plastic bag before bringing them home.

Hobbies that involve working with lead or lead paint such as shooting, lead-lighting, and furniture restoration may pose a risk. Prevent children from accessing hobby areas and hobby-related materials. Clean areas thoroughly to minimise exposure.

## Minimise your exposure

Regular hand-washing can greatly minimise your exposure to lead. Always wash hands with soap after outside play, touching pets, and before eating. Dry them well – damp hands pick up more dust. Keep fingernails short and use a nail-brush regularly. Regularly wash dummies and keep them out of the dirt by pinning them to clothing. Thoroughly wash fruit and vegetables before eating. Plant grass or ground cover on bare areas of soil.

## The three-bucket cleaning system



Use this cleaning system if you are concerned about lead in your home, particularly if you live near a lead industry, or if you have recently renovated your home.

You will need three buckets (one for detergent solution, one for clean water and one for dirty water), two mops or rags (one for clean and one for dirty), and a high-phosphate detergent.



1. Start at the top and at the furthest corner from the door.



2. Wet the first mop in the detergent solution and wipe the area. (Replace the detergent solution and water for every room or every half hour, whichever comes first.)



3. Squeeze the mop with dirty water into the empty bucket.



4. Wet the second mop in the clean water and wipe the area to rinse.



5. Squeeze the mop with rinse water into the bucket with dirty water.

## 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](http://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.leadsafeworld.com/shop](http://www.leadsafeworld.com/shop)) and most hardware stores.

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

© 2016 State of NSW and Environment Protection Authority

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.

Published by Environment Protection Authority  
59 Goulburn Street, Sydney NSW 2000

Phone: 131 555 (environment information and publications requests) TTY users: phone 133 677, then ask for 131 555

Speak and listen users: phone 1300 555 727, then ask for 131 555  
Email: [info@environment.nsw.gov.au](mailto:info@environment.nsw.gov.au)  
Web: [www.epa.nsw.gov.au](http://www.epa.nsw.gov.au)

Report pollution and environmental incidents:  
Environment Line: 131 555 (NSW only)

ISBN 978 1 76039 273 4; EPA 2016/0085;  
May 2016  
Updated photo credits June 2016

Photos on front cover: Simon Luckhurst/EPA

Printed on environmentally sustainable paper