

# Learning about lead

Lead exposure in children is associated with serious health effects, including developmental delays, learning difficulties, and behavioral issues. Children under age 3 are at the highest risk because their nervous systems are still developing. Because symptoms often are not apparent, a blood lead test is the best way to know if a child has been exposed to lead.



## Lead affects children differently

Lead is more dangerous for infants and children because they are rapidly growing and developing. They eat, drink, and breathe at higher rates than adults. Since they spend a lot of time on the floor or ground, they eat or breathe in more dirt and dust. If the dirt or dust they breathe in or swallow has lead in it, more lead will get into their bodies. Have your child tested for lead if they:

- Live in or regularly visit a home built before 1978.
- Live near industrial areas such as lead smelters, battery recycling plants, airports, or others that may release lead.
- Live with an adult whose job or hobbies involve lead.
- Have been in Mexico, Central America, or South America in the past year.
- Use the home remedies Azarcon, Alacron, Greta, Rueda, or Pay-loo-Ah.
- Have a playmate who has been treated for lead poisoning.
- Eat imported candies or foods containing imported spices.
- Have a habit of eating dirt or other non-food items.

## Common sources of lead in Colorado

Lead is a metal found in all parts of the environment, including the air, soil, and water. Lead also comes from human activities such as burning coal, mining, and manufacturing. Lead has been used in gasoline, batteries, ammunition, and cosmetics.



Lead-based paint in homes built before 1978.



Home remedies like Greta, Azarcon, Alacron, Rueda or Pay-loo-Ah.



Imported, glazed pottery that may be used for cooking.



Imported spices: turmeric, coriander, black pepper, thyme, & hanuman sindoor.



Lead-containing soil or dust that is tracked into the home.



Hobbies: leaded bullets or fish sinkers, artist paints, furniture refinishing.



Work in industries like construction, mining, welding, and plumbing.



Water in pipes from homes built before 1986.

## Questions? Contact ToxCall

303-692-2606 | [cdphe\\_toxcall@state.co.us](mailto:cdphe_toxcall@state.co.us)

## How lead poisoning happens

Lead poisoning usually happens when a child eats or inhales small amounts of lead for a long time. But lead poisoning can happen quickly if a person swallows something with lead, such as a toy or paint chip. Lead can hurt your whole body and can harm young children and babies before they are born.

## Signs and symptoms of lead poisoning

It can be hard to tell if a child is lead-poisoned because there may be no signs, or the signs may be hard to notice. Lead can cause:

- Harm to the brain and other systems.
- Speech, behavior, and learning problems.
- Slowed growth.
- Hearing problems.
- Digestive problems, loss of appetite.

Lead poisoning can harm health for a long time, even into adulthood. If you think you or your child may have lead poisoning, talk to a health care provider. Some low-cost health clinics also provide lead testing.

## Preventing lead poisoning

- If you live in or spend a lot of time in a home that was built before 1978 (for example, grandparents or in-home daycare):
  - » Make sure children cannot get to peeling paint or chewable surfaces that may be covered with lead-based paint, such as windowsills.
  - » If you see any peeling paint chips or dust, clean them up right away. If you rent, let your landlord know about peeling or chipping paint.
  - » Wipe down floors and other household surfaces with a damp cloth or mop at least once a week to reduce possible exposure to lead dust. Thoroughly rinse cloths and mops when you are done.
  - » Regularly wash children's hands and toys to remove dust and dirt. Household dust and outdoor dirt can both contain lead.
  - » If you work around lead, make sure to change your clothes and shoes before entering the house.
  - » Use only cold water from the tap for cooking, drinking, and mixing baby formula. Lead in tap water usually comes from lead pipes in the house, not from the water supply. Hot water is more likely to pick up lead from water pipes.
  - » If you haven't used your water for several hours,

run the cold tap water until the temperature is noticeably colder. This can take as much as two minutes.

- Avoid regularly using products from countries that do not have strict lead regulations.
  - » Some imported food products, such as spices and candies, are associated with elevated blood lead levels in Colorado children.
  - » Keep kids away from toys that may contain lead. These toys are often imported.
- Avoid traditional remedies that contain lead.
  - » Some traditional (folk) medicines used by East Indian, Indian, Middle Eastern, West Asian, and Hispanic cultures contain lead.

## Get a lead test if concerned

Does your child need to be tested for lead? Take this quick, interactive quiz to find out: [leadfreekidsco.org](http://leadfreekidsco.org)

- Discuss your concerns about lead with a health care provider, and ask about a lead test.
- Lead testing is currently free for children on Medicaid, Colorado Child Health Plan Plus (CHP), and the Colorado Indigent Care Program (CICP), as well as most private insurance. People can also inquire about free lead testing at community clinics.

## If you or your child has lead poisoning

- If your doctor has checked your blood for lead and you have been told it is high:
  - » Ask your doctor if the test needs to be confirmed.
  - » If it's still high after the confirmatory test:
    - ◇ Work with your physician on a treatment plan that follows CDC's recommendations.
    - ◇ Work with your local public health department or a lead investigation firm to have your home tested for lead.
    - ◇ Eat a diet high in iron and calcium. Good nutrition can reduce the amount of lead that is absorbed into the body.
    - ◇ Get retested every 3-6 months until your blood lead level returns to normal.
    - ◇ Follow basic steps for prevention (see Page 1).
    - ◇ If you have other individuals living in your home, talk to your doctor about checking their blood lead levels.