

Lead Poisoning in Children

What is lead poisoning?

Lead is a toxic metal that can harm children's health. Lead can be found throughout a child's environment. Lead poisoning occurs when small amounts of lead build up in the body. The harmful effects of childhood lead exposure can be prevented.

How does lead affect children's health?

Lead exposure can damage several parts of the body, including the brain and nervous system. In children, too much lead in the body can cause developmental, behavioral, and health problems. Even low levels of lead have been shown to affect a child's school performance, ability to pay attention, and IQ. Lead exposure during pregnancy can increase the risk for the baby being born too early or with a low birth weight.

Health effects of lead exposure in children



Damage to brain and nervous system



Learning and behavior problems



Slowed growth and development



Hearing and speech problems

How are children exposed to lead?

Lead exposure occurs when a child swallows or breathes in lead or lead dust. Children can be exposed through contact with paint chips and dust from lead paint in older homes. Children can be exposed to lead from other sources, such as contaminated soil, a parent's job or hobby, or some water pipes. Some products can contain lead, including imported food and spices, cookware, traditional medicines, toys, and jewelry.

Which children are at risk?

Children under 6 years of age are at greatest risk for health problems caused by lead exposure because of their small size and developing brains. Young children are at higher risk of lead exposure if they live in older homes, have parents who work with lead, or live near a lead industrial pollution site. Recent immigrants and refugees are also at a higher risk.

How can I prevent lead poisoning?

Talk to your child's doctor about testing for lead poisoning. A blood lead test is the best way to determine if a child has been exposed to lead. The key to preventing lead poisoning is to keep children from coming into contact with lead.

For more information:

Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services
Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Program
Phone: 1-888-242-1100 | Web: www.dhhs.ne.gov/lead

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