

Occupational and Hobby Exposures in Adults

What is lead?

Lead is a toxic metal used in many industries, products, and hobbies. Lead exposure happens when you breathe in or swallow lead dust. Lead poisoning can occur when it builds up in the body. No amount of lead is safe. Even at low levels, lead can damage many parts of the body.

Am I at risk?

People with certain jobs and hobbies are more likely to come in contact with lead. You may be at risk if you work around lead or have any of the following jobs or hobbies.



Working around metal

- Foundries and metal manufacturing
- Welding
- Recycling metal and batteries



Working with bullets

- Ammunition production
- Firing ranges
- Law enforcement



Construction

- Remodeling and renovation
- Plumbing
- Demolition



Other Jobs and Hobbies

- Auto repair
- Making pottery and jewelry
- Stained glass making

How can lead affect my health?

Lead can affect your health even if you do not feel sick. When lead builds up in the body, it can cause serious and permanent damage to your kidneys, brain, heart, and reproductive system. The higher the blood lead level, the more serious the symptoms and health effects.

Health effects of lead exposure in adults



Memory loss
Mood disorders
Headaches



Kidney damage
Abdominal pain



Reproductive health
problems



Muscle weakness
Joint pain
Numbness

How do I know if I am exposed to lead?

A blood lead level test is the best way to know if you are exposed to lead. A blood lead test measures how much lead is in your body. If you are at risk for lead exposure, ask your doctor or employer about getting a blood lead test.

Can my lead exposure affect my family?

Your exposure to lead can also affect your family. You can bring lead dust into your home on your clothes, skin, or hair. This is called 'take-home lead' and it can expose anyone who comes in contact with it. Family members living in your home may need a lead test, including young children, pregnant women, and women who are planning to be pregnant.

What can I do to protect myself from lead exposure at work?

- **Wear a respirator:** Wear a clean, properly fitted respirator (not a dust mask) equipped with P100 or equivalent filter in areas that have lead dust or fumes.
- **Wear protective clothing.**
- **Keep your work areas clean** using wet wipes.
- **Do not dry sweep** or use compressed air to remove lead dust.
- If you use a vacuum, use a high-efficiency particulate air (HEPA) vacuum.



Tips to prevent lead exposure

- **Wash your hands** and face before you eat, drink, or smoke.
- **Do NOT** eat, drink, or smoke in areas of lead dust and fumes.
- **Keep children away** from work and hobby areas.
- **Shower and change** out of work clothes before you leave work or as soon as you get home.
- **Wash and store work clothes** separately from other clothing.
- **Follow the health and safety protocol** for your workplace.
- **Ask your doctor** about getting a blood lead test or participate in your employer's lead screening program.



For more information:

Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services
Occupational Health Surveillance Program
Phone: 402-471-2937 | Web: www.dhhs.ne.gov/lead

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