



Dear Friend,

Lead poisoning is a serious but preventable health risk. The danger is especially serious for children – even low levels of lead in a child have been

shown to slow growth and development and impair learning and behavior.

It's important to reduce lead exposure in order to prevent lead poisoning before it happens. This brochure explains some potential sources of lead in and around a home, how to safeguard your family's health and the importance of testing children for lead levels in their blood.

If I can be of additional help in this or any other issue, please do not hesitate to contact my office.

Sincerely,

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Speaker of the Assembly

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# Reduce the risk of **Childhood** **Lead Poisoning**



Important information courtesy of

Speaker of the Assembly  
**Carl E. Heastie**

## What causes lead poisoning?

Lead is a naturally occurring element that can be found in and around homes. Lead exposure happens by ingesting it or breathing it in. Once lead is in your body, it circulates in the blood and can build up over time. Lead can also pass from a pregnant person to a developing fetus. Increased lead levels in your body can cause serious health issues and become lead poisoning.

## Why should I be worried?

Lead poisoning can have long-term effects, like slowed growth and development, damage to the brain and nervous system, hearing and speech problems, seizures and even death.

Because kids' bodies are still rapidly developing, the effects of lead exposure are especially hazardous. Even a low level of lead in their blood may lead to developmental delays, behavioral issues or difficulty learning.

There is treatment for lead poisoning, but it's best to prevent it.

## Why are young children especially at risk?

According to the state Department of Health, kids younger than 6 are the most likely to get lead poisoning due to their natural tendency to put their hands and fingers in their mouths. Be mindful of children:

- licking or eating lead paint chips
- putting dirty fingers or contaminated items in their mouths
- breathing in or swallowing lead-contaminated dust on toys or other surfaces.

Ingesting food or beverages made with tap water that flows through plumbing fixtures containing lead is another potential source of exposure.

## Where can lead be

## found at home?

### Common sources of lead exposure around the home include:

- Paint flakes and dust caused by the disturbance of lead-based paint
- Tap water that travels through pipes or plumbing fixtures that contain lead
- Soil contaminated by exterior lead-based paint, leaded gasoline or pollution from lead-using industries
- Jobs or hobbies that involve handling and working with lead-based products
- Lead-glazed ceramics, china and leaded crystal glassware
- Inexpensive metal jewelry or charms made abroad
- Spices, candies or foods, traditional medicines, remedies and health supplements, and cosmetics or religious powders imported from the Middle East, Latin America, South Asia, or China
- Imported or antique toys coated with lead paint or lead-based stains, or made of tin, brass or pewter alloys



## What are the symptoms of lead poisoning?

Most of the time, children have no obvious symptoms of lead in their blood. Warning signs, such as headaches, stomachaches, tiredness, paleness, crankiness or a change in appetite, can be hard to recognize since they can easily be mistaken for symptoms of other common childhood illnesses. That's why testing for elevated lead levels is crucial to preventing childhood lead poisoning.

## When should testing take place?

New York State requires health care providers to test all children for elevated lead with a blood test at age 1 and again at age 2.

Up to age 6, providers must ask parents about any contact their child might have had with lead and, if necessary, test again. Be sure to ask your provider about testing and know the results. Early detection of lead in the blood is critical to reducing the long-term effects of exposure.



**Questions about testing?** Ask your health care provider or contact your local health department for more information. Find yours at: [nyscho.org/directory](https://nyscho.org/directory)



*Meals high in iron, calcium and vitamin C, such as meat, broccoli, spinach, cheese, milk and citrus fruits, help prevent lead from being absorbed into the body.*

## What if testing shows elevated levels of lead?

If test results show your child has an elevated lead level, your health care provider will determine what treatment is needed. Treatment varies based on the amount of lead found in the blood. It can range from increasing dietary iron and calcium, which helps prevent lead from being absorbed by the body, to chelation therapy, a special medication used to help the body eliminate lead.

You must also find and remove the source of lead from your child's environment to prevent further exposure. Your local health department will help you check in and around your home to find the source. Your child will need follow-up tests to make sure the lead is gone.

## How can I reduce the risk of lead exposure?

- Wash your and your child's hands and face frequently, especially before meals, to rinse off any dust or dirt that may contain lead.
- Take off your shoes or wipe off any soil before entering the house.
- Clean floors, windowsills and other dusty surfaces with wet cleaning methods regularly.
- Only use cold tap water for drinking, cooking and preparing formula. Let the cold tap water run for a minute before using it.
- If you work with lead, shower and change your clothes before going home.
- Wash any lead-contaminated clothes separately from other laundry.



*Only use cold tap water for drinking, cooking and preparing formula. Let the cold tap water run for a minute before using it. Heated water can cause any lead in the piping or fixtures to leach into the water.*



## Home repair

### DOs and DON'Ts

**DO** consider hiring or consulting a pro who knows how to work with lead hazards if your home was built before 1978.

**DON'T** paint over old lead paint; the lead will still be under the new paint layer.

**DO** remove or cover lead paint in poor condition with sheetrock, paneling or vinyl wallpaper.

**DON'T** use sanders, heat guns or open flames to remove lead paint; the dust and fumes are poisonous. Scraping, which limits the dust and makes cleanup easier, is a safer technique.

**DO** wear a tight-fitting mask over your mouth and nose to avoid breathing in dust or fumes; wear goggles, gloves and hair and shoe covers.

**DON'T** eat, drink or smoke in the work area.

**DO** keep children, pregnant and nursing people away from the work area.

**DON'T** allow pets into the work area; they can pick up dust on their fur or paws and transfer it to family members.

**For more information**

**National Lead Information Center**  
[epa.gov/lead](https://epa.gov/lead)  
800-424-LEAD (5323)

**NYS Dept. of Health**  
[health.ny.gov/environmental/lead](https://health.ny.gov/environmental/lead)  
800-458-1158

**Centers for Disease Control and Prevention**  
[cdc.gov/lead-prevention/about/index.html](https://cdc.gov/lead-prevention/about/index.html)

**U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission**  
[cpsc.gov](https://cpsc.gov)  
800-638-2772