

## Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) for Parents

### **Q: What is Lead?**

Lead is a natural metal found in the earth. Lead was used in gasoline until the 1980's. Heavy traveled roads still contain lead from the cars and trucks. Lead-based paint was used in and on homes before 1978. The paint chips, peels or cracks releasing fine dust particles in the soil or in the home. There may be lead in the water pipes made from lead or soldered at the joints. Lead dust can get into your home and car if someone works in jobs such as construction, painting, battery production and car repairs. Hobbies can be a source of lead dust, such as making bullets, fishing sinkers, and stained glass. Consumer products such as spices, pottery, antique dishes, make-up, toys and many other items can be the source of lead. To get more information on lead sources go to [cdcinfo@cdc.gov](mailto:cdcinfo@cdc.gov)

### **Q: What is Childhood Lead Poisoning?**

Lead poisoning occurs when a child is exposed to lead dust from their environment that enters their bodies through their mouth from contaminated hands, snacks, or toys. Children under the age of six are at the greatest risk for lead poisoning due to their normal hand-to-mouth activity. These young children explore their world with their hands and mouths, putting them at high risk for lead poisoning. Often their toys, snacks and hands have lead dust on them. Children have been known to swallow paint chips or flakes. Many children are exposed to lead dust from house renovation projects that stir up lead dust that is not properly contained and cleaned up.

### **Q: How can lead affect my child?**

A: Lead affects almost every organ and system in a child's growing body. Very small amounts of lead can affect their still developing brains and other parts of their nervous system. Lead in a child's body can slow down growth and development, damage hearing and speech, cause behavior problems and make it hard to pay attention and learn.

### **Q: How do I know if my child has lead in his or her blood?**

Most children do not look or act sick when they have been exposed to lead. A blood test is the only way to find out if your child has been exposed to lead. Talk to your child's doctor about having your child tested at one and again at two years old. Children who were not tested at those ages should have a test between 3-6 years of age. A small amount of blood will be taken from the finger, toe or arm. .

### **Q: Which test is better for my child to have?**

We recommend a venous (arm) blood test because it is more sensitive and accurate than the capillary (finger stick) method. Your doctor can get venous results in 2-3 days. The capillary test can be falsely elevated if there is contamination on the child's finger; the person doing the test does not use lead free testing supplies or incorrectly removes blood from the finger. If the finger stick is elevated, your doctor will want your child to have a venous blood test done as a follow-up.

### **Q: What do my child's test results mean?**

There is no safe lead level in children. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) have set a reference value of 5 micrograms per deciliter (mcg/dL) which means that 97.5% of all children in the U.S. ages 1-5 have blood lead test results below

this level. If your child has an elevated blood lead level of 5 mcg/dL or above, this means your child has had more contact with lead than most child of his or her age.

**Q: My child had a lead level done and below 5 mcg/dl. Do I need to have him or her tested again? Should we talk about ages?**

Yes. Your child should be retested again if: your child lives in a home built before 1978, there are renovations occurring in the home, they attend a new child care center built before 1978, someone in the home has a job or hobby that works with lead, or there is a place they spend time at that was built before 1978. If your child is on Medicaid, WIC or attends Head start, they will be tested again.

**Q: My doctor told me my child has an elevated blood lead level. Can I get medicine for this?**

Most children who have lead poisoning do not look or act sick and usually do not have symptoms. There is no medical treatment for blood lead levels below 45 mcg/dL. The only treatment is to prevent and decrease exposure to lead through diet, good hygiene and removing the source of lead hazards.

**Q: What changes can I make to my child's diet?**

Provide three meals a day and in between meal snacks that are rich in calcium, iron and vitamin C. Good nutrition and hygiene can help reduce the amount of lead a child absorbs in their body. Prevent lead from mixing with food. Give your child healthy snacks. Bake or broil foods, don't fry. Children with poor diets in calcium, iron and vitamin C are adversely affected by lead.

**Q: How can improving hygiene make a difference?**

Wash toys, hands and play spaces often. Clean child's hands, toys, stuffed animals, bottles and pacifiers often. Keep your child's play area free of dust and dirt. Place a rug at each entry door to stop dirt from tacking into the house. Take shoes off at the door. Wash hands and fingernails after playing outside. Wash yard toys before bringing them inside or just leave the yard toys outside. Wipe pet's paws off when they come inside.

**Q: How do I protect my child from lead?**

Remove the lead source and look out for lead hazards. Lead poisoning occurs when children ingest or inhale lead. This means keeping children away from lead paint, the dust that comes from lead based paint breaking down and not taking lead home with you from jobs and hobbies.

- Frequently clean with a HEPA vacuum and disposable rags areas where dust and paint chips settle
- Wash hands, toys & pacifiers frequently
- Keep children away from lead paint & dust
- Have your home tested for lead and renovate safely
- Test for potential lead contamination in soil or water
- Avoid imported foods & candies (i.e. Mexican candies)
- Don't allow children to mouth metal charms, keys, trinkets & jewelry
- Don't use recalled products & toys
- Only use cold tap water for drinking and cooking, and mixing formula.
- If you have a hobby that involves lead, be sure to change your clothing and wash hands thoroughly before touching your child.
- If you work with lead, follow your company's lead hazard program and practice personal hygiene before going into your car and home.

**Q: My doctor says my child has been exposed to lead. How often will they check my child to see if the lead is going away?**

Most children will be checked in 3 months. Sometimes a doctor will decide to check a child again in 1 month. It is very important that you as the parent keep this follow-up appointment. Lead can take up to 1 year or longer to decrease. That is why repeat blood tests are so important. There is no safe level of lead.

**Q: Should other people in my home be tested?**

Siblings, playmates and other children who may spend time with you and your family, should be tested if they are younger than 6 years of age. If you are pregnant ask your ob-gyn doctor to test you. If you work with lead or have a hobby with lead components talk to your doctor and ask to be tested.

**Q: I am breastfeeding. Should I stop so I can make sure my child is getting enough calcium from other sources?**

No, do not stop. Continue to breastfeed. Lead does not concentrate in breast milk because it does not bind to nor dissolve in fat; thus, levels of lead are generally higher in a mother's blood than in her milk. The benefits of breastfeeding outweigh the negatives. Talk to your doctor and have a lead level done. Some experts believe if the lactating woman has an elevated blood lead level, they need to take twice as much calcium. Please ask your doctor about this.

**Q: Could I have given my child lead when I was carrying them?**

Only if you worked with lead, were around home renovations or have a hobby that exposed you to lead at the time you were pregnant. If you are pregnant and are exposed to lead, the unborn fetus will be exposed because lead can cross through the placenta. If your child is exploring his or her environment now, the chances are they are being exposed from inside their home.

**Q: I have heard children who have been exposed to lead may have developmental problems. Is this true?**

Experts have shown *some* children who have been lead exposed go on to have difficulties in speech, education, show inattention and distractibility, do not grow as fast compared to children who were not lead exposed. If you have concerns about your child's development, talk to your child's doctor.

**Q: Is it true some child who had elevated blood lead levels may not have any problems until they enter school?**

Yes. Pre-kindergarten, kindergarten, first, fourth, sixth and seventh grade are called *critical transition points*. Children face physical, emotional, social and academic challenges at these times. If you notice inattention, distractibility, aggression, irritability and hyperactivity talk to your child's doctor and teachers.