

Fact Sheet: Lead Poisoning

The Problem

Childhood lead poisoning is the number one environmental health risk facing children in industrialized countries today. In the United States, more than three million children age six and younger-- that's one out of every six children in that age group--has toxic levels of lead in their bodies. Similar proportions of children are affected in other countries, from Germany to Australia, that have used lead in industry and consumer products.

Lead is a powerful neurotoxin that interferes with the development and functioning of almost all body organs, particularly the kidneys, red blood cells, and central nervous system. In young children, lead retards the development of the central nervous system and brain. High levels of lead exposure can result in coma, convulsions, and death.

At low levels, lead can cause reduced IQ, reading and learning disabilities, attention deficit disorder and behavioral problems. As a result, childhood lead poisoning is associated with lower educational achievement, higher rates of high school drop-out and increased behavioral problems. In the long run, children who are lead poisoned may be less likely to become positive contributors to our communities and our economy.

Sources of Lead Poisoning

In the United States, lead was banned in residential paint in 1978, but about 60 million homes still contain lead paint. And, most children are poisoned in or near their homes.

Most children are poisoned by ingesting household dust that contains lead. Invisible lead dust is just as hazardous as paint chips. This dust can be created by friction --- the opening of windows or the rubbing of a tight door. Many children are poisoned during home renovation work that generate lead dust.

Drinking water can also be a problem, especially in homes with lead pipes, faucets or fittings made of brass (which contains some lead) or homes having copper pipes with lead soldered joints. If your water source is a well with a sub-merged pump, you should stop using the water and have it tested.

Lead Poisoning Can be Prevented

Lead poisoning is entirely preventable. What's required is: Awareness of the risks -- particularly the danger during home renovations. Having your children tested (a simple blood test). Removal and/or reduction of any lead hazards in homes, child care centers, and schools.

Contact HomeSafe Lead Testing at 1-800-648-LEAD (or at WWW.LEADPRO.COM) for a referral to a certified lead inspector, risk assessor or abatement contractor.