

Fact Sheet: Lead Testing

Who Should Do the Testing?

Testing to determine the presence of lead in paint, dust, water, and soil is best done by trained professionals. Some states require lead inspectors to be state-certified *.

Testing for Lead in Paint

To thoroughly analyze the paint in your home, each different painted surface should be tested. Different paints may have been used on walls, window frames, doors, and so on. Paints may also differ from room to room. Each of your home's painted surfaces, both inside and outside, should be tested separately.

Professional testing companies use two basic methods to measure lead in paint: 1) X-ray fluorescence (XRF) uses portable detectors that X-ray a painted surface to measure the amount of lead in all the layers of paint. This type of testing is done in the home and disturbs little, if any, paint. 2) Laboratory testing of paint samples involves removing samples of paint from each surface to be tested, usually from an area of about two square inches. Samples are sent to laboratories for analysis. This method leaves a bare spot on each surface tested.

Do-it-yourself test kits are commercially available. These kits do not tell you how much lead is present, however, and their reliability at detecting low levels of lead has not been determined. Professional testing for lead in paint is recommended.

Testing for Lead in Household Dust

Household dust may contain tiny particles of lead released from lead-painted surfaces inside the home or tracked in with lead-contaminated soil from outside.

The recommended sampling method for dust is the surface wet wipe. Dust samples are collected from different surfaces, such as bare floors, window sills, and window wells. Each sample is collected from a measured surface area using a wet wipe, which is sent to a laboratory for testing.

Testing for Lead in Water

Household drinking water may contain lead, usually from old pipes that contain lead or from lead solder in plumbing.

Water samples can be collected directly from the faucet. Two samples are usually collected. One sample is taken from water that has been standing in the plumbing lines overnight or for eight hours or longer, and a second sample is taken after letting the water run for several minutes to flush the lines. The water samples are then sent to a laboratory for analysis.

Testing for Lead in Soil

Lead may be present in the soil around your home and near streets and highways close to your home. To test soil for lead, samples are taken from areas near your home where children play and from areas that contain soil likely to be tracked into your home. The soil samples are sent to laboratories for analysis.

* Contact HomeSafe (1-800-648-LEAD) for a referral to a certified lead inspector, risk assessor or abatement contractor in your area.

This document was prepared by the U.S. Army Construction Engineering Research Laboratories, Champaign, Illinois, for distribution by the National Lead Information Center. [Doc date: 10/92]