

# Lead Poisoning

This text is from the National Institute of Environment Health Sciences site.



## What is Lead, and why should I care?

Lead is a heavy metal and basic chemical element. Lead is also a poison. It can slow mental and physical growth and make you very sick. For these reasons, you should know where lead might show up in your environment so you can avoid contact with it!

## Sources of Lead Poisoning

- **HOUSE PAINTS:** Before 1950, lead-based paint was used on the inside and outside of most homes. It was used to make several colors including white, and was known to dry to a hard, durable surface. In 1977, federal regulations banned lead from paint for general use. But homes built before 1977 are likely to contain lead-based paint.
- **SOIL:** Soil (dirt) near heavily-used streets and roads may contain lead because lead used to be used in gasoline. Lead may also be found in the soil next to homes that previously had been painted with lead-based paint. Lead in the soil can contribute to high levels of lead in household dust.
- **DRINKING WATER:** Lead may get into drinking water when materials used in plumbing materials, such as pipes, lead-based solders, brass and chrome plated faucets, begin to corrode (break down).
- **OTHERS:** Lead has recently been found in some plastic mini-blinds and vertical blinds which were made in other countries. In addition, lead may be present in old toys, some imported toys, lead-glazed or lead-painted pottery, leaded crystal, and some inks, plasters, hobby and sports materials (such as artists' paints, ammunition, stained glass treatments, or lead sinkers used in fishing).

Lead in paint was greatly reduced in the 1950's. And later, in 1978, the addition of lead to paints was eliminated. Today, paints and gasolines with lead in them are no longer sold (with the exception that lead is still included in some artist's paints). But even though paint sold today is safe, there are still pre-1950 buildings with old lead paint around in our communities. The old paint flakes off, and the lead dust ends up on babies' hands and toys. And you know where babies put their hands and their toys! Even minor exposures to lead can cause nervous system disorders, lowered IQ's, impaired memory and reaction times, and shortened attention spans. So it is very important to clean up areas where lead paint was once used and dust frequently to avoid the lead particles that accumulate in household dust.

*Lead poisoning is a serious problem!* Childhood lead poisoning is still one of the most important health issues in the United States today. According to recent CDC estimates, 890,000 U.S. children age 1-5 have elevated blood lead levels, and more than one-fifth of African-American children living in housing built before 1946 have elevated blood lead levels. These figures reflect the major sources of lead exposure: deteriorated paint in older housing, and dust and soil that are contaminated with lead from old paint and from past emissions of leaded gasoline. And to complicate things, lead poisoning can be so subtle that the affected child may not show any clear physical signs. Therefore, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention now recommends screening children in high risk areas or populations for lead exposures.

# Symptoms of Lead Poisoning

- headaches
- muscle and joint weakness or pain
- excessive tiredness or lethargy
- behavioral problems or irritability
- difficulty concentrating
- loss of appetite
- metallic taste in the mouth
- abdominal pain, nausea or vomiting
- constipation

These symptoms may or may not be present, and of course each of them can also be caused by many other common illnesses. But in cases where some of these symptoms are present for a long time, no other cause has been found, and there may have been some exposure to lead, then tests for test poisoning should be considered.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

1. What is lead?

- A. a heavy metal that's safe
- B. a chemical element used to treat poisoning
- C. a heavy metal that's a poison
- D. a type of paint used in homes

2. What does the text list?

- A. sources of lead poisoning
- B. materials used in pipes and faucets that corrode
- C. ways lead poisoning can be treated
- D. basic chemical elements that make people sick

3. Lead can be very dangerous. What information from the text best supports this statement?

- A. Before 1950, lead-based paint was used on the inside and outside of most homes.
- B. Lead can slow mental and physical growth and make you very sick.
- C. Lead can be found in different areas of our environment.
- D. Soil near heavily-used streets and roads may contain lead because lead used to be used in gasoline.

4. Based on the text, who is most at risk of getting lead poisoning?

- A. a kid growing up in a home built after 1980
- B. a kid who drinks water from a river by the mountains
- C. a kid growing up in a home built before 1950
- D. a kid growing up in a home with new plumbing

5. What is the main idea of this text?

- A. Before 1950, lead-based paint was used on the inside and outside of most homes.
- B. Lead poisoning can be so subtle that people who have it may not show any clear physical signs.
- C. Symptoms of lead poisoning can also be caused by many other common illnesses.
- D. Lead is a poison that can be found in different parts of our environment and can make people very sick.