



**GET THE  
LEAD**

**OUT**

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**INTERVENTION**

How to lower  
blood lead levels  
in children

**Illinois Department of  
Public Health**

**O**f the 1.2 million children aged 6 years and younger in Illinois, more than 6,400 children are considered to be lead poisoned because of the level of lead in their blood.

Because lead is found everywhere, city, suburban and rural children are all at risk if they breathe in lead dust or eat lead paint and dust.

This brochure provides information on lead poisoning and describes steps you can take to reduce your child's exposure to lead.

Call your doctor, your local health department or the Illinois Department of Public Health's Illinois Lead Program at 217-782-3517 or 866-909-3572 or TTY 800-547-0466 for information on having your home inspected for lead and removing lead hazards safely.

**HAVE YOUR CHILD TESTED FOR  
LEAD POISONING.**

# I INTERVENTION

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## How to lower blood lead levels in children

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### WHAT IS LEAD POISONING?

Lead poisoning is caused by eating lead paint chips or eating or breathing in lead dust. The body does not need lead, and there is no safe level of lead in the blood.

Lead is especially harmful to infants and children 6 years of age and younger because their small bodies absorb lead more easily than an adult's does. Even small amounts of lead can slow a child's development. Very high levels can lead to seizures, coma or even death. Medicines do not "cure" lead poisoning. Very high levels of lead may require treatment to lower levels in order to prevent life threatening conditions.

Damage caused by lead poisoning is permanent and non-reversible. However, spending time communicating with and reading to your child may improve his/her ability to:

- process information more quickly
- perform multiple tasks at the same time (multi-tasking)
- retrieve old information more rapidly
- learn new information more easily
- concentrate through distractions

If you have concerns about your child's development, talk to your physician or a member of the lead poisoning prevention staff at your local health department.

### KNOW THE SOURCES OF LEAD.

Your children may be exposed to lead from —

- Peeling or chipping paint in homes built before 1978.
- Dust from sanding or removing old paint and wallpaper.



- Soil that is contaminated by leaded fuel from major highways or industry that uses lead, or around an older home with chipping outside paint.
- Old water pipes made of lead or newer fixtures that contain lead solder.
- Food grown in contaminated soil or stored in imported pottery or cans with lead solder seams.
- Bullets, fishing sinkers and hobbies that use lead, such as ceramics and stained glass.
- Imported candies, jewelry or toys



## WHAT CAN I DO TO REDUCE MY CHILD'S EXPOSURE?

### Wash up

- Have children wash their hands and faces after they play outside and before they eat.
- Wash infant's and toddler's toys often. Throw away toys painted with lead-based paint — usually those made in another country.

### Eat well-balanced meals

- Give your child foods high in iron and calcium such as lean meat, eggs, greens, milk, cheese and yogurt. Fruits and fruit juices high in vitamin C such as tomatoes, oranges, grapefruit, tangerines, papaya, mangoes, cantaloupe and strawberries, will enhance iron intake, which will prevent the child's body from absorbing lead.
- Do not store food in open cans or pottery.

### Use cold water

Older homes may have lead plumbing pipes that put lead into the water. Newer homes may have lead solder connecting pipes.

- Run the water from the cold water tap for a few minutes before using it for cooking or drinking.
- Do not use water from the hot water tap for cooking, drinking or preparing infant formula.

### Check your home

- Look for chipping and peeling paint and paint dust in your home. Check window sills, windows, doorways, woodwork and porches. Check outside the house for paint chips.
- Consider other sources such as hobbies, employment, imported goods, foods and herbal remedies.

## See your doctor

- Take your child to a doctor for a physical exam.
- Have your child screened each year for lead if your physician's assessment indicates a high risk for lead exposure.

## HOUSEKEEPING HINTS

- Use detergent and water to clean up loose paint chips around windows, doors or woodwork. Throw away all cleaning cloths.
- Place duct tape over loose paint or plaster for temporary covering. Call your local health department or the Illinois Department of Public Health's Illinois Lead Program for information on safe methods to remove paint, plaster or wallpaper.
- Cover hard-to-clean surfaces with contact paper.
- Wet dust and wet mop often to remove lead dust in the house. Use a clean cloth or mop dampened with a cleaner. Wash rags separately from other laundry.
- Keep work clothes of an adult who works in a lead industry or uses lead in a hobby separate from clothes of other family members. Wash these clothes separately.
- To remove paint chips and dust from around the outside of the house, hose off porches, sidewalks, driveways and the sides of buildings. Scrub with a stiff brush or broom and soapy water; then rinse as clean as

possible. Pick up and throw away paint chips.

- Old carpets containing lead dust need to be removed. It is impossible to completely remove lead dust settled into carpets. For information on how to safely remove old carpets, contact the Illinois Lead Program listed below.

## SCREENING FOR LEAD

All children ages 6 months through 6 years should be assessed every year for their risk of lead poisoning. Check to see if you live in a high-risk ZIP code by visiting [www.idph.state.il.us/envhealth/pdf/Lead\\_ZIP\\_Codes.pdf](http://www.idph.state.il.us/envhealth/pdf/Lead_ZIP_Codes.pdf). Children living in high-risk ZIP codes are required to have a blood lead test. Illinois state law requires all children entering day care, nursery school, preschool or kindergarten to provide proof of a blood lead test or an assessment.

For more information, call the Illinois Department of Public Health's Illinois Lead Program at 217-782-3517 or 866-909-3572 or TTY 800-547-0466.

**GET THE  
LEAD**

**OUT**



**State of Illinois**  
Pat Quinn, Governor



**Department of Public Health**  
Damon T. Arnold, M.D., M.P.H., Director

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**ALL CHILDREN AGES 6 MONTHS THROUGH 6 YEARS  
SHOULD BE ASSESSED FOR LEAD POISONING EVERY YEAR.**

For further information,  
contact the Illinois Department of Public Health's **Illinois Lead Program**.

866-909-3572  
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