

Protect Your Children From Lead Poisoning

Are you planning to paint or renovate your house?

Do you live near an industrial factory?

Was your home built before 1978?

If you answered yes to any of these questions, you and your family may unknowingly be exposed to high levels of lead.

Lead poisoning affects an estimated 170,000 children under the age of 6 in Illinois. The IPC suggests that all caregivers of children assess their homes and play areas for risk factors for lead poisoning, and take precautions to reduce children's exposure to lead.

Lead poisoning occurs when lead dust is breathed or lead paint is eaten. Lead is most commonly found in paint on both exterior and interior areas of homes that were constructed prior to 1978. Most homes built before 1960 contained paint with high concentrations of lead in it. High levels of lead dust can build up on window sills and floors, as well as when older paint is disturbed (such as during remodeling).

Many areas of Illinois also contain high levels of lead in the soil. Lead has been deposited in the soil from leaded gasoline, lead paint dust, and industries that use lead. Other sources of lead include:

- water from old lead piping
- food that was grown in lead-saturated soil
- earthenware or fishing products (made with lead or lead-based paint or glaze).

Lead poisoning can occur at any age. Children under the age of 6 are at higher risk of lead poisoning because their bodies absorb the lead more easily and the lead can build up to higher levels. To protect young children, health care providers suggest that all children be assessed for lead poisoning between the ages of six months and 1 year. If a child is found to have high levels of lead in his or her blood, the IPC recommends that parents identify and remove the source of lead, or remove the child from the environment.

Children with high lead levels in their blood may not have any symptoms, but the long-term effects can be quite problematic. Lead poisoning can cause learning disabilities, decreased growth, hyperactivity and impaired hearing, as well as damage to other vital organs within the body, such as the kidneys and stomach.

The following preventive steps can be taken to reduce exposure to lead:

- Clean up chipping or peeling paint from inside and outside your home
- Mop floors and wipe window sills by using a damp mop or cloth and a detergent with phosphate (such as automatic dishwasher detergent)
- Hire a qualified contractor to remove lead-based paint
- Shower and change clothes before going home after working with lead in your job or hobby (you also should store and wash work clothes separately)
- Encourage children to play in grassy areas of the yard or playground to decrease the amount of soil that they may touch or track into the home on their shoes
- Wash your children's hands before they eat or sleep, especially after playing outside
- Wash toys, stuffed animals and bedding regularly
- Eat foods high in iron and calcium to help reduce the amount of lead your body absorbs
- Cook and drink from the cold water tap because hot water and water that has stood in the pipes for a long time contains more lead (Note: this only applies to people with lead pipes in their home)

If you suspect you or your children may have been exposed to lead or other environmental poisons, don't wait for symptoms to appear. Call the IPC toll-free at 1-800-222-1222 for prevention and treatment advice; information is available 24 hours a day.

More information about lead poisoning can be obtained from these additional resources:

- The National Lead Information Center (1-800-LEAD-FYI) or the center's clearinghouse (1-800-424-LEAD)
- The Environmental Protection Agency's Web site, www.epa.gov/lead
- The Illinois Department of Public Health's Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Program (217-782-0403 or 1-800-545-2200.)