



Hendricks
Regional Health

Lead Poisoning: **A GUIDE FOR FAMILIES**

It may have been a surprise when your child's healthcare provider recommended testing for lead poisoning, particularly if you live in a newer home. For decades, we had been chiefly concerned about lead-based paint in homes built before 1978. This guide will discuss what we have recently learned about lead exposure and poisoning and why we want all children aged 6 and younger tested.

New Data, Sources & Regulations

New data has shown that no amount of lead in the blood is safe and that exposure to a tiny amount of lead (the size of dust) can cause poisoning.

Children aged 6 and younger are especially vulnerable because lead is toxic to brain and bone development. Young children also touch surfaces adults don't and tend to put their hands or other objects into their mouths.

Lead-based paint remains the most significant source of exposure and poisoning in Indiana, as 57% of the state's housing inventory pre-dates that year. When the paint peels and cracks, it makes lead dust. Children can be poisoned when they swallow or breathe that dust.

However, given the small amount of lead needed to cause poisoning, we are also concerned about exposure from the following:

- Soil near some industrial sites
- Certain imported canned foods, jewelry and candy
- Selected plastics and painted toys
- Certain water pipes (rare)
- Jobs and hobbies that involve lead-based products; caregivers can inadvertently expose children to lead from gun ranges, stained glass and ceramics to name a few.

Healthcare providers nationwide have sounded the alarm on this matter after seeing children go untreated because they did not have the traditional risk factor of lead-based paint in their homes. In Indiana, a new law was enacted at the beginning of 2023, requiring all healthcare providers to determine whether children aged 6 and younger have been tested for lead poisoning and to offer the screening.

Health Effects in Children

Exposure to lead can seriously harm a child's health. Effects include:

- Damage to the brain and nervous system
- Slowed growth and development
- Learning and behavior problems
- Nausea, hearing loss and speech problems

Testing Recommendations

We test for lead poisoning with a simple blood test and recommend testing at a child's 1- and 2-year checkups. We also recommend screening children aged 3-6 if they have yet to be previously checked.

Treatment & Prognosis

While exposure to lead can seriously harm a child's health, the good news is lead poisoning is 100% treatable with medication. It's also preventable. Here are some steps you can take to ensure your child's safety:

- If you live in a home built before 1978, talk to your county health department about testing paint and dust in your home.
 - Renovate safely by using contractors certified by the Environmental Protection Agency. Visit epa.gov/lead for more information.
 - Stay current on recalls by visiting the Consumer Product Safety Commission's website at cpsc.gov.
 - Wash children's hands frequently and wash toys, pacifiers and bottles often.
 - Keep your home clean by dusting often and removing shoes before entering living areas.
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