



## **LEAD POISONING - FAQ**

### **1. WHAT IS LEAD POISONING?**

Lead is a metal that can make infants and young children ill. Many of those affected never even look sick. Sometimes children with lead poisoning can have learning disabilities and other health problems. Fortunately, lead poisoning can be detected and it can be prevented.

### **2. HOW DO CHILDREN GET LEAD POISONING?**

The most common cause of lead poisoning is from the lead paints that were used in the 1960's and earlier. Lead is also in dust, soil, water, food, and in the air.

Children can get lead poisoning by:

- putting hands or toys with lead dust on them or in their mouths
- eating the lead paint chips that peel off the walls
- chewing on window sills and door frames

### **3. WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF LEAD POISONING?**

Lead can harm virtually every system in the human body. Lead is particularly harmful to the developing brain and nervous system of fetuses and young children. In many cases there are no visible symptoms of elevated blood-lead levels or lead poisoning.

### **4. WHERE IS TESTING FOR BLOOD-LEAD LEVELS AVAILABLE? HOW MUCH DOES TESTING COST?**

Your private physician or your local health department can test for blood-lead levels.

Many private insurance policies cover the cost of testing for blood-lead levels. Children covered by Medicaid are eligible for free screening. The cost of a blood-lead test generally ranges from \$10 to \$75, plus the charge for an office visit.

### **5. HOW TO TELL IF YOUR CHILD HAS LEAD POISONING?**

The only way to be sure is with a quick and easy blood test. Every child should be tested at 6 months old, and after that as recommended by your doctor. If you don't have a doctor, the Department of Health can help you. Just call 212-BAN-LEAD.

## **6. IS THERE A CURE FOR LEAD POISONING?**

The main treatment for lead-poisoning is to stop the exposure. Removing the lead from a person's environment helps to ensure a decline in blood-lead levels. The longer a person is exposed to lead, the greater the likelihood that damage to the person's health will result. In some cases, medications are used to lower blood-lead levels.

## **7. SHOULD PREGNANT WOMEN BE CONCERNED ABOUT LEAD POISONING?**

Lead can be passed from the pregnant woman to the fetus, so women should take steps to ensure that they do not have excessive lead exposure during pregnancy.

Specifically, pregnant women should not:

- engage in any activity that disturbs lead-based paint
- live in or be present in a house or apartment where work is under way that disturbs lead-based paint
- return to a house or apartment where lead-based paint has been disturbed until at least 24 hours after the work has been completed

## **8. WHAT YOU CAN DO TO PROTECT YOUR FAMILY?**

- At least once a year, take your children under 6 years old to be tested for lead.
- Keep children away from peeling paint. If your home was built before 1960, and you have peeling paint, call Department of Housing Preservation and Development at 212-960-4800.
- Wash children's hands before they act, after they play outdoors and before they go to sleep. Wash your hands before preparing food.
- Wet mop floors, and wipe furniture, window sills and other dusty surfaces.
- Don't let children play under bridges, near highways and heavily traveled roads.
- Serve meals that are high in iron and calcium to help prevent lead from being absorbed into your children's bodies.
- Run cold water for at least a minute before using. Never use hot water from the faucet to make baby formula or for cooking.
- For testing water, call the Department of Environmental Protection 718-699-9811.
- Purchase bottled water for home and office consumption.

## **9. I LIVE IN AN APARTMENT. DOES MY LANDLORD HAVE RESPONSIBILITY TO REMOVE LEAD-BASED PAINT FROM MY APARTMENT?**

If you have a child under six who has a blood level of 20ug/dL or more, your landlord may be required to take certain actions. Laws and regulations vary according to the jurisdiction in which you live.

## **10. I LIVE IN A PUBLIC HOUSING PROJECT. DOES THE HOUSING AUTHORITY HAVE TO DO ANYTHING ABOUT LEAD-BASED PAINT?**

If you live in a development which was built before 1978, the housing authority should have given you a brochure telling you that the property may contain lead-

based paint. The brochure describes the hazards of lead-based paint, the symptoms and treatment of lead poisoning, and the advisability and availability of blood-lead levels screening for children under seven years of age.

If your child has an elevated blood-lead level of 25 ug/dL or more, the housing authority must test your apartment within five days after being notified by your doctor of your child's high blood-lead level. If lead-based paint is found during testing the housing authority must treat those surfaces within 14 days. If the housing authority is unable to treat the hazardous surfaces, then the housing authority must either move your family into a unit that was previously treated or one that was built after 1978.

## **EPA**

United States Environmental Agency

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### **Health Information Provided by Women's Health Specialists**

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