



Health Effects of Lead Poisoning

Penn Medicine
Lancaster General Health

August 2021

What is lead poisoning?

Lead poisoning is when a person's health or body functions are negatively affected by lead that is found in what they eat, drink, touch or breathe. By far, the most common source of lead poisoning is lead-based paint – often in the home. **Lead poisoning has no cure but is 100% preventable.**

Many factors affect how the body handles exposure to lead, such as:

- Age
- Nutritional status
- Genetic makeup
- Length of exposure

Who is at risk for lead poisoning?

Lead can affect almost every organ and system in the body. Children 6 years old and younger are most at risk to the effects of lead.

Children: Their growing bodies absorb more lead than adults, and their brains and nervous systems are more sensitive to the damaging effects.

Adults, including Pregnant Women: They can be exposed to lead by eating and drinking food or water containing lead, or from dishes or glasses that contain lead. Other risks include: spending time in areas where lead-based paint is deteriorating or working in a job or engaging in hobbies where lead is used.

What are the effects of lead poisoning?

Children: Even low levels of lead in the blood of children can result in:

- Learning disabilities
- Lower IQ
- Speech development problems
- Hearing loss
- Hyperactivity

Adults, including Pregnant Women: Lead can accumulate in the body over time, where it is stored in bones along with calcium. During pregnancy, lead is released from the mother's bones along with calcium and can pass from the mother, exposing the fetus or the breastfeeding infant to lead. This can result in serious effects to the developing fetus and infant, including:

- Premature birth or low birth weight
- Damage to the brain, kidneys and/or nervous system
- Increased risk of developmental, learning and behavioral problems
- Increased risk of miscarriage

How can I lower lead exposure?

Keeping your home clean and well-maintained will go a long way in preventing lead exposure.

- Inspect and maintain all painted surfaces to prevent paint deterioration.
- Address water damage quickly and completely.
- Clean around painted areas where friction can generate dust, such as doors and windows
- Flush water outlets used for drinking or food preparation.

How can I learn more about lead poisoning?

Contact us at **717-544-LEAD** (5323) or info@leadfreefamilies.org.

Visit us online at: LeadFreeFamilies.org.

(Source: <https://www.cdc.gov/nceh/lead/prevention/health-effects.htm>)