

# Lead and Your Child

## Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Program

### QUICK GUIDE

## Understanding How Lead Affects Your Child

### What are the symptoms of lead exposure?

Children who have been exposed to lead may not look or act any different. A blood test is the best way to tell if your child has been exposed to lead.

### How can lead hurt my child?

Even at low levels, lead can hurt your child. Lead affects many parts of your child's body, especially the brain. Children under the age of 6 are most at risk for the harmful effects of lead.

Lead can cause:

- Difficulty with learning and attention
- Problems with hearing and speech
- Delayed growth and development
- Behavior problems like hyperactivity and aggression

### Where did my child get exposed to lead?

Children can get exposed to lead by breathing it in or by eating it. The most common source for child lead exposure is from lead-based paint in homes built before 1978. Old lead paint can rub off and become tiny particles of dust a child may breathe in or eat when it gets on their hands or other objects they put in their mouths. Sometimes paint can come off in larger chips, which some children may put in their mouths. The lead dust and chips can even get into the soil around older homes and buildings, or where an old building once stood.

Other sources of lead include:

- Soil near old industrial sites, former orchard lands, and heavily traveled roads
- Drinking water that goes through lead pipes or plumbing fixtures with lead
- Lead passed to a fetus during pregnancy or to an infant through breastmilk
- Particles of lead carried home from a family member's work or hobby
- Some metal or painted toys or costume jewelry
- Some traditional remedies or cosmetics
- Some imported ceramics and aluminum cookware



## Help your child's brain growth

While exposure to lead can harm your child's brain, that doesn't mean it always will. You can take steps to help improve your child's brain development.

Have your child get regular developmental screenings to make sure they are meeting their milestones.

To have your child screened, talk with your doctor, or call the Help Me Grow Washington Hotline at 1-800-322-2588.

### Contact us:

1-800-909-9898  
[lead@doh.wa.gov](mailto:lead@doh.wa.gov)  
[doh.wa.gov/lead](http://doh.wa.gov/lead)

## Your Child's Test Results

Child's name: \_\_\_\_\_ Test Results: \_\_\_\_\_ µg/dL

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ When does my child need another blood lead test? \_\_\_\_\_

If test results are not written here, ask your doctor, nurse, or health care provider for this information.

## Understanding Your Child's Test Result

### What does my child's lead test result mean?

The amount of lead found in a child's blood is called the blood lead level. A blood test tells us how much lead (in micrograms: µg) is in a child's blood (per deciliter: dL).

Blood Lead Test Result	What does this mean for my child?
Less than 5 µg/dL	Your child's blood lead test is not high. However, no amount of lead is safe and even low amounts can harm your child. Be aware of potential risk factors around your home and environment to avoid exposures to lead.
5-14 µg/dL	Your child's blood lead test is high. Identify possible sources of lead in your child's environment to prevent any further exposure. Your child will need another blood lead test within 1 to 3 months.
15-44 µg/dL	Your child's blood lead test is very high. Identify possible sources of lead in your child's environment to prevent any further exposure. Your child will need another blood lead test within 1 to 4 weeks.
45 µg/dL and above	Your child's blood lead test is extremely high. Talk with your child's doctor immediately. Your child may need medication and may need to be hospitalized. Your child will need another blood lead test within 48 hours or sooner.

### What can I do if my child is exposed to lead?

Unless your child's blood lead level is extremely high, there is no medication for lead exposure. The best thing you can do is to find and remove or reduce the source of lead, or your child's access to that source. Talk with their doctor or nurse about lead risks in your home. Depending on where you are living, you may get a call from a local public health worker who can help you find the source of lead.

There are things you can do to prevent or reduce your child's exposure to lead. Even if your child doesn't have high levels of lead in their blood, you can still take these steps to keep their lead levels low:

- Wash your child's hands often, especially after playing outside and before eating.
- If you live in or spend a lot of time in a house that was built before 1978, regularly check for signs of chipping, peeling, or deteriorating paint. Before you repair, paint, or renovate your home, find out about lead-safe practices at <https://www.epa.gov/lead>
- Damp dust and mop frequently and use a HEPA vacuum when you clean carpets.
- Soil may contain lead. Remove shoes before entering your home to avoid tracking soil inside. Cover bare soil with mulch or grass.
- Serve foods high in calcium, iron, and vitamin C to protect your child from lead.
- If household members work with lead, have them shower and change clothes before entering the home. Wash work clothes separately from the family's clothes.
- Run your taps for a few minutes prior to use and only use cold water for cooking or mixing formula for infants.