

Testing and tips for preventing lead poisoning in children

By Ellie Lanz

Have you ever wondered if you or your child has been exposed to lead? Lead is most commonly found in houses built before 1978. It can contaminate old water pipes in your home, chipping paint containing lead, contaminated dirt and soil, toys, food and more. Lead poisoning can lead to several adverse health outcomes, especially in children.

Young children are more commonly affected by lead poisoning because they are more likely to put things in their mouth or chew on lead contaminated objects such as toys, windowsills and dirt. Due to their small size and developing bodies, young children also absorb lead into their blood stream more effectively than adults.

The effects of lead poisoning in children can be catastrophic. High blood lead levels can affect nearly every organ in a child's body, however it may be hard to tell your child is experiencing symptoms of lead poisoning. Some signs to watch out for are behavioral problems, learning difficulty, lowered IQ, hyperactivity, growth delay and hearing problems. If you are noticing any of these signs, you should speak with your child's medical provider.

If you think you might be exposed to lead within your home, here are some things you can do:

- Keep your home clean and free of dust by cleaning surfaces frequently with a wet cloth or microfiber.
- Wash your hands regularly.
- Play in grassy areas as opposed to dirt.
- Wash toys, pacifiers, and bottles frequently.
- Run your water for about 30 seconds before consuming it.
- Eat a diet high in vitamin C, calcium, and iron. Eating a balanced diet that includes these nutrients can help keep lead out of the body.
- Remove your shoes when you enter the house. If there are pets in the home, be sure you are keeping their paws clean and free of dirt or dust too.

The best way to find out if your child has been exposed to lead is to get a blood lead test. Most health insurances, including Medicaid and Healthy Montana Kids, cover the cost of testing. A capillary test, done with a finger poke, can give results in under five minutes. A venous test is done with a blood draw in a lab or doctor's office. Contact your healthcare provider to set up an appointment for testing.

RiverStone Health will be offering free blood lead capillary testing throughout the summer. Keep an eye on our Facebook page to take advantage of free lead capillary testing for your child.

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