



## FAQs: Lead in Paint, Dust & Soil

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### Why do we worry about lead?

Lead is a naturally occurring heavy metal which is harmful to human health, especially children. Normal behaviors, such as: crawling, playing on the ground, and frequent hand-to-mouth, put children at greater risk from lead exposure than adults. Children exposed to lead can experience headaches, abdominal pain, constipation, hearing problems, delayed growth, decreased IQ, behavioral and learning problems, damage to the brain and nervous system, and in extreme cases, death. Many of these adverse effects, such as reduced IQ and neurodevelopmental deficits, are irreversible. Thus, there is no safe level of lead exposure.

### How can children be exposed to lead from paint?

In 1978, the federal government banned consumer uses of lead-based paints. However, lead may still be present in your home or child care facility if it was built before 1978. The old lead paint can be covered by more layers of new (non-lead) paint, causing no harm. However, chipping or peeling lead paint is a major hazard and requires immediate attention. Areas where this is more likely to occur are windows and window sills, doors and door frames, stairs, railings, banisters, and porches. Young children can be exposed to lead from eating paint flakes or breathing in fine particles.

### How can children be exposed to lead from dust?

Lead dust is a result of deteriorating (flaking or peeling) lead paint. Contaminated dust can unwittingly be spread throughout homes and facilities and into areas and onto objects that are frequently used and touched. Young children are especially vulnerable to high exposures to lead from dust because they often crawl and play on the floor, mouth objects, and place their fingers in their mouths. They can also breathe in fine lead dust.

### How can children be exposed to lead from soil?

Lead is found in high concentrations in soil when exterior lead-based paint from older (built or painted before 1978) houses or buildings have chipped or peeled off. Additionally, lead was widely used in gasoline before the 1980s; therefore, soil along major roadways may still contain high concentrations of lead. Lastly, industrial areas, or neighborhoods in former industrial areas, may have lead-contaminated soil from emitted pollution. Children come into contact with lead when playing outdoors in yards, playgrounds, and gardens that have contaminated soil.

## How can I minimize children's exposure to lead in paint, dust, and soil?

There are many ways that you can prevent exposure to lead from those sources:

- If your home or child care facility was built before 1978:
  - Check paint conditions at least monthly and keep your home or facility free of flaking, chipping, peeling, or deteriorating paint.
  - Wash all areas around doors and windows at least weekly using a mop, sponge or paper towel with warm water and a general all-purpose cleaner.
  - Before painting, remodeling, renovating or making repairs that disturb paint, ensure that the Federal requirements in EPA's Renovate Right brochure are followed. These requirements can be found at [www2.epa.gov/lead/renovate-right-important-lead-hazard-information-families-child-care-providers-and-schools](http://www2.epa.gov/lead/renovate-right-important-lead-hazard-information-families-child-care-providers-and-schools).
- Regardless of the age of your home or child care facility:
  - Wet mop at least once a week.
  - Vacuum (with a HEPA-filter vacuum) often to avoid soil or dust that has been tracked inside.
  - Supply a rough mat at the entrance of your child care facility and have everyone wipe their shoes well before coming indoors. OR, choose to be a shoe free facility!
  - Keep children away from playing in areas of bare soil.
  - Test your soil for lead and other contaminants before planting a vegetable garden.
- Lastly, share the Eco-Healthy Child Care® Lead Fact Sheet with the families you serve and take opportunities to educate them about the importance of blood lead testing.