



# What You Should Know About Exposure to Lead

## What is lead?

- Lead is a metal that is found in many places. You can't always see lead, even when it's present in high amounts in substances like paint, dust or dirt.

## What damage is done by lead?

- Lead in the body is not safe at any level. Even very small amounts of lead can permanently damage the brain as it develops. The only way to prevent damage from lead is to prevent exposure to lead.
- Lead makes it harder for a child to learn and causes behavior problems.
- Damage done by small amounts of lead may be hard to see. Most children who get lead in their body do not have any physical symptoms.

## Where is lead found?

- Children are often exposed to lead in their own homes and at places they visit.
- Lead was added to paint until 1978. Most older homes have paint that contains lead. In the United States, lead is in paint in:
  - 87 percent of homes built before 1940,
  - 69 percent of homes built from 1940 to 1959 and
  - 24 percent of homes built from 1960 to 1977.
- Lead gets into dust and dirt. Children eat lead by getting lead on their hands and then putting their hands in their mouth.
- High amounts of lead in dust occur when paint is chipping or peeling or when paint is disturbed during repairs.
- Lead is sometimes found in toy jewelry and other products.



## What can I do to protect my child?

- Learn if you have lead in your home. Before you sign a lease, ask the landlord about lead. Before you buy a home, have it inspected for lead.
  - If your home was built before 1978 or you don't know when it was built, assume it has lead.
- Painted surfaces should be kept in good repair. Do not disturb paint unless you and your family are protected from the dust that will occur during repairs. Repairs not done safely can make the problem worse. Learn how to protect your family before work begins by getting information from the sources below.
- Have your child's blood lead level checked.
  - A parent or guardian of a child between the ages of 6 months through 6 years of age, attending a licensed day care center, day care, home preschool, nursery school, kindergarten, or other child care facility, licensed or approved by the State, must provide a statement from a physician or health care provider that the child has been risk assessed or screened for lead as defined in Section 6.2 of 410ILCS. (410ILCS 45/7.1)
  - A blood lead test at 1 and 2 years of age is required for children who could be exposed to lead. Also, whenever new exposures to lead may have occurred, a blood lead test should be considered.

## For more information, please contact:

- Illinois Department of Public Health, phone 866-909-3572 or 217-782-3517 (for hearing impaired use only TTY 800-547-0466)
- Your local health department
- Access information on the Web at <http://sis.nlm.nih.gov/enviro/lead.html>

