

# Protecting your child from lead

## What is lead?

Lead is a metal that is found in nature, but we can get higher and more damaging exposure in our homes. Seventy percent of lead poisoning is from paint.

## Why is lead dangerous to your child?

Lead can interfere with brain development, especially in young children who play on the floor and put things in their mouths (hand-to-mouth behaviour). In pregnant women, lead can affect the unborn baby by crossing the placenta. If you are concerned about lead, talk to your family physician. Prevention is important. Here are some tips to protect your family:

### Lead paint in older homes

- Homes built before 1978 contain lead paint.
- Dust or flakes from paint in poor condition (chipped, cracked, or peeling) can contain a lot of lead.
- Be careful when renovating your home or refinishing antiques—these are both risky activities for lead exposure.
- Children are most commonly exposed to lead by putting their fingers and toys, which can be covered with lead dust, in their mouths.

### How to protect your child

- If paint is in good condition, leave it; it is not a health hazard. If it is deteriorating, or if you plan to do a renovation, read the Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation booklet *Lead in your Home*: [www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/odpub/pdf/61941.pdf](http://www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/odpub/pdf/61941.pdf).
- Your public health department, at a home inspection, can take a dust sample to measure for lead.
- Avoid home renovations that cause lead dust while you are pregnant.

### Lead in drinking water

- Drinking water in older (before 1960) Canadian homes, day cares, and schools might contain some lead.
- Lead can come from 2 places in your home:
  - service connection pipes that link the house to the mains and
  - old plumbing with lead solder inside the home.
- Lead in drinking water is much less of a concern than old lead paint.

### How to protect your child

- If the water has been standing in the pipes (eg, over a weekend or overnight) allow it to run for 5 minutes, or until it is cold, before drinking.
- Contact your public health department for advice and to test your water.

- Some water filters remove lead from drinking water.
- For more information, go to the Health Canada website: [www.hc-sc.gc.ca/ewh-semt/pubs/water-eau/lead-plomb-eng.php](http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/ewh-semt/pubs/water-eau/lead-plomb-eng.php).

## Other possible sources of lead

- There might be lead in the soil around homes from peeling outdoor paint and from nearby lead smelters or highways.
- Children's toys can be a source of lead exposure. (Many toys have recently been recalled because of lead.)
- Imported crayons, jewelry, soft vinyl lunch boxes, candle wicks, and PVC mini-blinds can contain lead.
- Lead-soldered pots, lead-containing glazed pottery, some imported canned foods, and crystal glassware might contain lead and contaminate food and drink.
- Some imported spice mixtures contain lead.
- Some folk remedies, including many Ayurvedic medicines and some Hispanic, Indian, Thai, Burmese, and Hmong Vietnamese folk remedies contain lead (see [www.cdc.gov/nceh/lead/tips/folkmedicine.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/nceh/lead/tips/folkmedicine.htm)).
- Some ethnic cosmetics contain lead (eg, kohl, surma, ceruse, sindoor).
- Some craft materials might contain lead (eg, ceramic glazes or solder for stained glass).
- If you work with lead (eg, in smelters or refineries) you might bring home lead dust on your clothing. Wash these clothes separately from other laundry.

### How to protect your child

For more information on these other sources, visit the following websites:

1. Health Canada: [www.hc-sc.gc.ca/ewh-semt/contaminants/lead-plomb/products-produits-eng.php#a26](http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/ewh-semt/contaminants/lead-plomb/products-produits-eng.php#a26)
2. US Centres for Disease Control and Prevention: <http://198.246.98.21/nceh/lead/tips/sources.htm>

For more information on lead in toys and other products, visit the following websites:

1. Health Canada's advisories, warnings and recalls: [www.hc-sc.gc.ca/ahc-asc/media/advisories-avis/alpha-eng.php#lead](http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/ahc-asc/media/advisories-avis/alpha-eng.php#lead)
2. US Centres for Disease Control and Prevention's lead recalls for toys: [www.cdc.gov/nceh/lead/Recalls/toys.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/nceh/lead/Recalls/toys.htm)
3. US Consumer Product Safety Commission's recalled product search: [www.cpsc.gov/cgi-bin/haz.aspx](http://www.cpsc.gov/cgi-bin/haz.aspx). (Choose "Lead" and click on "Find.")