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LEAD POISONING: FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What is Lead Poisoning and whom does it affect?

Lead poisoning is preventable and remains the most common environmental hazard for young children in Connecticut. Lead is a highly toxic metal found in the environment and has no known function in the human body. Both adults and children can suffer from the effects of lead poisoning.

Young children under the age of six are especially vulnerable to lead's harmful health effects, because their brains and central nervous system are still being formed. Even very low levels of exposure can cause problems such as learning disabilities, behavioral problems, impaired hearing, and kidney damage. At high levels of exposure, a child may become permanently impaired and even die from lead poisoning. Early symptoms of lead poisoning may include loss of appetite, fatigue, irritability, anemia, and abdominal pain.

In adults, exposure to lead affects the peripheral nervous system and can also damage the kidneys, heart and reproductive system.

Where is lead found?

People may be exposed to lead through various sources, such as paint, soil, air, drinking water, food and ceramics. Much of this lead is invisible to the naked eye.

- Paint** The biggest source of concern is lead in paint. Until 1978, lead paint was commonly used on the interiors and exteriors of our homes. With age, this paint will crack and chip, and young children may eat these chips. Lead paint can also be in contaminated household dust and in bare soil around the house, where children may play. Improper renovation of homes containing lead based paint can also get into the air, dust and soil. Those doing the work must have adequate personal protection to prevent themselves from lead dust.
- Soil/Dust** The past use of leaded gasoline has presented a hazard today, as much of that lead remains in soil where it was deposited over the years, near well-traveled roads and highways. Children who play in dirt contaminated by lead can get lead-contaminated soil under their fingernails, on their toys or track it into the house. Even pets can come into contact with lead-contaminated soil and expose humans.
- Air** Sources of airborne lead include emissions from gasoline combustion, smelters, and battery manufacturers, among others. Since the passage of the federal Clean Air Act, there is less lead in motor fuels and tighter emission controls on industrial activities. This effort has reduced air emissions of lead nearly 90 percent during the last 20 years.
- Water** Drinking water can also get contaminated with lead and contribute to elevated blood lead levels. Lead can leach into drinking water from certain types of plumbing materials (lead pipes, copper pipes with lead solder, and brass faucets). While water is usually not the primary source of exposure for children it is important to note that formula-fed infants are at special risk of lead poisoning if lead-contaminated water is used.

Other Sources of Lead:

- ✓ Making stained glass windows using lead solder
- ✓ Glazing and firing pottery and ceramics
- ✓ Making lead fishing weights
- ✓ Reloading and making ammunition; target practice on indoor and outdoor firing ranges
- ✓ Refinishing furniture
- ✓ Some cultural cosmetics and home remedies

Guidelines for protection:

- ✓ **Wash children's hands and toys regularly.** Also, check lead recall lists for items that should be immediately taken from children.
- ✓ **Eat a nutritionally balanced diet.** Eating plenty of foods that contain iron, calcium and zinc can reduce the amount of lead the human body retains.
- ✓ **Use only cold water from the tap** for drinking, cooking, and for making baby formula (Hot water is more likely to contain higher levels of lead when used with plumbing that contains lead. Testing your water for lead content is advised.)
- ✓ **Prevent children from playing in bare soil.** Provide them with sandboxes when possible. Plant grass on areas of bare soil or cover the soil with wood chips, if possible.
- ✓ **Check your ceramic ware.** Some pottery may contain lead that can leach into food and drinks. Avoid eating off any colorfully painted ceramic plates, and avoid drinking from any ceramic mugs unless you have them tested. It is particularly important to have pottery from foreign countries (Mexico, Latin America or Asia) tested for lead.
- ✓ **Avoid candy from Mexico** or other countries that contains tamarind and/or chili.
- ✓ **Do not store alcohol in crystal containers.** Crystal decanters and glasses are often made with lead. When an acidic substance or alcohol is left in these containers for longer than just a few hours, the lead could leach into the liquid.
- ✓ **Wipe feet** or remove shoes to keep dust out of the house.
- ✓ **Test your home for lead-based paint.** Make sure your child does not have access to peeling paint or chewable surfaces painted with possible lead-based paint.

Where is lead testing done?

203-622-7843 GREENWICH DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH LAB tests for lead in blood, water and paint. They also provide guidelines on remodeling a home with lead-based paint. Hours: M-F 8:00am to 3:00pm

Where can I get more information?

For general information call the National Lead Information Center 1-800-LEAD-FYI
EPA's Safe Drinking Water Hotline 1-800-426-4791 (in Spanish, call 1-800-424-5323).
CT Department of Public Health www.ct.gov/dph Lead Poison and Control Program