

How Housing Matters

Lead-safe housing is healthy housing

Virginia Cooperative Extension



Lead Hazards

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The federal government banned lead-based paint in 1978. Before 1950, lead-based paint was very common. Generally, the older the home, the more likely it is to have lead-based paint.

Where Is Lead Found?

- Paint in many homes built before 1978 may contain lead.
- Soil surrounding a home may have lead from exterior paint dust or from leaded gasoline in cars.
- Household dust can contain lead from deteriorating lead-based paint or from soil containing lead that is tracked into the home.
- Old plumbing can contain lead or lead solder, and lead can get into drinking water.
- Paint on toys and furniture — especially if antique or imported — may contain lead.
- Food or liquids stored in lead crystal or lead-glazed pottery may contain lead.

Where Is Lead Most Likely to Be a Hazard?

- Peeling, chipping, chalking, or cracking lead-based paint is a hazard that needs immediate attention.
- Lead-based paint is found on surfaces that receive a lot of use and areas children often touch, such as windows and window sills, doors and door frames, stairs, railings, banisters, porches, and fences.
- Lead dust is formed when lead-based paint is dry-scraped, dry-sanded, or heated. Settled lead dust re-enters the air when people vacuum, sweep, or walk through it.

How Do I Check My Family and Home for Lead?

Your family:

- Blood tests can detect high levels of lead and are important for:
 - Children ages 1 to 6, especially in their early years, ages 1 to 2.
 - Children and other family members exposed to high levels of lead.
- Doctors can explain what high lead levels mean and if further testing should be done.

Your home:

- Two tests for the home:
 - A **paint inspection** tells you the lead content of every type of painted surface in your home. It will not tell you if the paint is hazardous.
 - A **risk assessment** tells you if there are any sources of serious lead exposure and what actions to take to address these hazards.
- Have professionals do the testing in the home because they are trained to safely test your surfaces without spreading any contaminated material. Contact the National Lead Information Center at 800-424-LEAD (5232) for a list of professionals in your area.

- Trained professionals use a range of methods for checking the home, such as visual inspection of paint, use of a portable X-ray machine, lab tests of paint samples, and surface dust tests.
- Do-it-yourself kits can be purchased at most home improvement stores and are a convenient way to see if you should seek further help from professionals. Most kits have swabs that change colors if lead is detected on the surface.

What Are the Health Effects of Exposure to Lead?



If not detected and treated in children, lead exposure can cause:

- Damage to the brain and nervous system
- Behavior and learning problems, such as hyperactivity
- Slowed growth
- Hearing problems
- Headaches

Lead exposure in adults can cause:

- Reproductive problems in men and women
- High blood pressure/hypertension
- Nerve disorders
- Memory and concentration problems
- Muscle and joint pain

How Can You Protect Your Family?

- If renting, notify your landlord about peeling or chipped paint.
- Clean up paint chips immediately.
- Use a mop, sponge, or paper towel with warm water and a general, all-purpose cleaner or a cleaner made for lead.
Remember: Never mix ammonia and bleach, because they can form a dangerous gas.
- Wash children's hands often, especially before eating and sleeping.
- Keep play areas clean and wash bottles and toys regularly.
- Keep children from chewing on windowsills or other painted surfaces.
- Clean or remove shoes before entering your home to avoid tracking lead in from work or soil.



What laws and regulations relate to buying and selling homes or renovating?

- Beginning April 22, 2010, federal law requires that contractors performing renovation, repair, and painting projects that disturb more than 6 square feet of paint in homes, child care facilities, and schools **built before 1978** must be certified and trained to follow specific work practices to prevent lead contamination.

Federal law requires that individuals **receive certain information before renting or buying** pre-1978 housing:

- **Landlords** must disclose known information about lead-based paint and lead-based paint hazards before leases take effect. Leases must include a disclosure form about lead-based paint.
- **Sellers** must disclose known information about lead-based paint and lead-based paint hazards before selling a house. Sales contracts must include a disclosure form about lead-based paint. Buyers have up to 10 days to check for lead hazards.

Where Can I Find More Information?

Lead in Your Home: A Parent's Reference Guide – www.epa.gov/lead/pubs/leadrev.pdf Testing

Your Home for Lead in Paint, Dust, and Soil – www.epa.gov/lead/pubs/leadtest.pdf

Finding a Qualified Lead Professional for Your Home – www.epa.gov/lead/pubs/broch32e.pdf

Protect Your Family From Lead in Your Home – www.epa.gov/lead/pubs/leadpdf.pdf

Fight Lead Poisoning With a Healthy Diet – www.epa.gov/lead/pubs/nutrition.pdf

National Lead Information Center – www.epa.gov/lead/nlic.htm;
800-424-LEAD (5232)

All information provided by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) at www.epa.gov/lead/pubs/leadinfo.htm.

www.ext.vt.edu