

# LEAD POISONING IN CHILDREN



## What is lead?

- A toxic substance found in the environment both naturally occurring and industry produced.

## How do we come into contact with lead?

The three most common sources for lead exposure are:

- Drinking water
- Lead based paint
- Lead in soil and dust

## Why are children susceptible to lead poisoning?

Lead poisoning is of greatest concern with children under the age of 6 and with pregnant mothers because:

- children absorb and retain a larger percentage of ingested lead than adults;
- infants and children consume more water (more lead if it is in water) for their weight than adults do; and
- hand-to-mouth activity and play patterns expose children to lead in soil, paint chips, and dust.

## What are the human health effects of lead on children?

The early signs of lead poisoning are:

- headaches
- fatigue
- abdominal pain
- joint pain

Continued exposure may cause:

- paralysis
- convulsions
- coma
- death

Lead is harmful to the brains and nervous systems of unborn babies and young children. These effects can cause slower development, problems with behavior and irreversible damage to mental abilities.

## What do I do if I suspect lead poisoning?

If lead ingestion or lead poisoning is suspected:

- a physician should be contacted immediately;
- a blood test can be taken to determine how much lead is present in the blood; and
- drugs can be taken to treat the poisoning and to reduce the toxicity of the lead.

## Prevention

### What do I do if my drinking water contains lead?

- You should check for lead in your plumbing system and consider replacing lead pipes if found.

- Run water for at least 1 minute before using it.
- Avoid using old kettles that may contain lead solder that could get into the water.

**What do I do if lead is found in soil?**

- Advise children not to ingest or play in the soil.
- Cover children's play areas with sod, pavement, or sand to reduce the amount of bare soil.

**What do I do if I have lead paint in or around the house?**

- Remove paint that is chipping or peeling (especially from ceilings and walls).
- Contact your local Health Unit to get instructions on proper removal procedures.
- Do not allow children to play with toys that could be coated with lead paint.

For further information, contact the Northwestern Health Unit.