What You Should Know About Lead Poisoning

In Wisconsin, thousands of children are lead poisoned each year.

What is lead?

- Lead is a toxic metal that is harmful to human health

Where can lead be found?








- Dirt around houses
- Paints and varnishes used on the inside and outside of houses
  - Children are often exposed through peeling and chipping paint
- Water service lines/pipes
- Other sources such as toys, jewelry, ceramics, and certain jobs

What is lead poisoning?

- Lead poisoning is a buildup of lead in the body.
- Lead can enter the body:
  - Through the skin
  - By breathing in lead dust
  - By eating/drinking something polluted with lead, such as water or paint chips
- **Lead in the body is never safe**, but it becomes most unsafe when it reaches high levels.
- Lead poisoning **rarely** happens overnight. It can take weeks, months, or even years.

Signs and symptoms of lead poisoning in children

- Lead poisoning symptoms can look different in every child.
- Most children **DO NOT** show any symptoms, the only way to know is to test.

Sudden symptoms in children can include:

- Low appetite
- Abdominal pain
- Constipation
- Tiredness/headaches

Long-term symptoms in children can include:

- Developmental delays
- Learning challenges
- Behavioral health issues
- Physical health issues

Who is impacted by lead poisoning?

Children **under 6 years** are most at risk for lead poisoning, but it can **impact everyone**.

Lead and pregnancy

Babies can be exposed to lead while in the womb.
This can cause:

- Premature birth
- Low birth weight
- Slow physical development

Ask your primary care provider and get tested if you think you may be at risk. For help finding a primary care provider, read this article.

Lead screening and testing information

- Children should have regular check-ups with their health care provider.
- Health care providers can screen for lead with a questionnaire and/or a finger prick blood test.
- Before they are 6 years old, all Wisconsin children should be **tested for lead 3 to 6 times** depending on their risk level.*
    - *Factors that increase risk: living in Milwaukee or Racine, Medicaid or WIC enrollment, or living in an older home
- Lead blood testing is the collection and testing of a blood sample.
- A blood lead level of **3.5µg/dL or higher** is considered lead poisoned.
- Primary care providers, local health departments, and WIC agencies are good resources for lead screening and testing.

Does insurance cover lead testing?

- **Children:** testing is covered
- **Pregnant people:** testing is often not covered
- **Medicaid:** fully covers testing for children
- **Private insurance:** may vary

Lead poisoning prevention

Nutrition

- Regular, healthy meals can help prevent lead poisoning.
- Eat more calcium, vitamin C, and iron.
- **Always** wash hands before preparing or eating food. For healthy meal ideas visit: Fight Lead Poisoning with a Healthy Diet

Reducing lead hazards in the home

- Hire contractors **who are trained** in lead-safe practices to do lead abatement (getting rid of lead hazards) in and around the home (old windows, lead dust, and chipping paint).
- Local health departments often have testing and abatement services.

Cleaning

- Wash hands
- Mop and wet wipe
- Keep shoes outside
- Wash toys

Water Testing

- If you don't know whether your tap water contains lead, you should have the water tested by a certified lab.
- The Wisconsin State Laboratory of Hygiene offers water testing for lead. Visit their website to learn more about their services and to order a test kit.

For families already impacted by lead

- Check out the Youth Wellness Hub for mental and behavioral health services
- Find academic and school-based support for children with special education needs
- Find physical health services for Children and Youth with Special Healthcare Needs

Additional resources

- Lead poisoning is preventable: Lead-Safe Wisconsin
- Lead abatement and safe homes: Lead Safe Homes