**Lead Facts**

**Sources**

Lead is a toxic metal that is harmful to people and comes from a variety of sources around us. It continues to be used in many products around us because of its properties: it prevents corrosion, helps give fuel an octane boost, retards growth of mold and mildew, and helps to stabilize paint to make it more durable.

The air, soil, dust, food and water can contribute to the body’s total lead accumulation. Lead in the air comes from aircrafts that use leaded fuel and from also a plethora of industrial emissions such as ore and metal processing facilities, waste incinerators, and lead smelters to name a few. Lead in soil may be present due to emissions from vehicles that burned leaded fuel, releases from underground or aboveground storage tanks, as well as paint chips from homes and businesses in disrepair. Lead dust can be present from the opening and closing of doors and windows that are painted with lead paint. Fine particles of dust are created from the friction of materials moving against one another. Lead in consumer products may be found in some imported food, dishes (coloring), toys, jewelry and other objects. In addition, metal food cans may contain a lead seam that holds the can together. Lead in water could be caused by source contamination but usually occurs through corrosion of plumbing products containing lead. Babies and children whose diet consists of copious amounts of water (formula, juice) are at a significant risk if lead is present in the water.

**What is being done about this?**

* Leaded paint was banned by the Consumer Product Safety Commission in 1978 for residential purposes but is still used on structural steel in construction (e.g. buildings and bridges).
* Tetraethyl lead was phased out as an additive to gasoline.
* Pipes and plumbing fixtures that are not “lead free” were banned for drinking water, but “lead free” pipes and fixtures are still allowed to contain less than 1% lead.
* Water coolers and water fountains are no longer allowed to be lead lined.
* Testing of children aged 6 months to six years for blood lead is recommended by the Center for Disease Control and required in NYS by the Department of Health for children at high risk.
* Common home renovation activities like sanding, cutting, and demolition can create hazardous lead dust and chips by disturbing lead-based paint and should be performed by Environmental Protection Agency certified “RRP” (renovation, repair and painting) contractors.

**Lead exposure**

Lead may enter the body through ingestion or inhalation. The degree of harm to an individual depends on a number of factors: dose, frequency and duration of exposure, as well as one’s overall susceptibility and general health.

Adults: low levels of lead may cause memory and concentration problems, digestive problems, high blood pressure, and could cause harm to a fetus during pregnancy.

Children: low levels could affect attention span, learning disabilities, poor classroom performance, nervous system and kidney damage. Children aged six and under are more susceptible to the effects of lead because their bodies are still developing at a much faster rate than older children.

Very high blood levels in children and adults may cause convulsions, coma and death.

**How to protect yourself**

* Approximately 64 million homes built prior to 1978 contain lead-based paint. If you have leaded paint, ensure that it is maintained in good condition, not peeling or blistering. Not sure if you have leaded paint? Inexpensive instant lead testing swabs can be purchased and testing performed by the homeowner. Lead abatement by professionals could be quite expensive.
* Clean frequently around painted windows and doors where friction generated dust may accumulate. A wet sponge or rag is best instead of a vacuum, which could spread contamination through the vacuum’s motor and into the rest of the room.
* If you have leaded paint on the outside of your house, the soil could possibly be contaminated with lead so you may not want to grow a vegetable garden adjacent to the house.
* If undergoing renovations, require contractor to use lead-safe practices, such as those in EPA’s RRP program.
* Houses built prior to the 1980’s could contain pipes or fixtures with lead. Environmental testing labs are available to give advice about testing and analysis of water. Brass fixtures do contain lead.
* Wash hands prior to preparing foods or eating if lead dust is expected.
* EPA recommends using cold water to drink or cook with because hot water will leach more lead than cold water. In addition, EPA recommends flushing water outlets prior to consumption in case any lead has leached from the faucets.

Information taken from:

* [www.epa.gov](http://www.epa.gov)
* EPA document 3Ts for Reducing Lead in Drinking Water and Schools
* CDC fact sheet, Blood Lead Levels in Children
* EPA document Lead Safety for Renovation, Repair and Painting