



Lead in Soil

Why is lead in soil?

Almost all of the lead in soil comes from lead-based paint chips flaking from homes (built before 1978), factory pollution, and the past use of leaded gasoline. Over time, lead builds up in soil. Lead levels in soil are usually higher in cities, alongside roadways, near industries that use lead, and next to older homes where crumbling lead paint has fallen into the soil, and lead dust has washed off of the roof.

How does lead get from the soil into my child?

Any person can become lead poisoned, but a child younger than 6 years old is at a higher risk. Lead-contaminated dirt clings to fingers, toys and other objects that children put in their mouths. This is the most common way that lead in soil gets into your child.

Lead in soil does not pass through unbroken skin. If bare soil is covered with plants, rocks or other ground cover, children have less contact with the dirt and the lead in it. The more lead that is in your soil, the more harmful the soil can be to your children's health. Lead can also get into your body by eating contaminated fruits and vegetables that have lead dirt outside or absorb lead from the contaminated soil.

A pregnant woman can also pass lead to her unborn child. The baby can be born too small or too early. If a pregnant woman's lead level is very high, there is a higher chance of a miscarriage.

Lead is a poison that can harm the brain, kidneys, and other organs, especially in children. Even a small amount of lead in a child's body can impact their development, making it hard for them to learn, pay attention, and behave.

Most children who have lead poisoning do not look or act obviously sick. The only way to know if your child has lead poisoning is to have your doctor give your child a blood test for lead. At risk children should be tested at 1 and 2 years old for lead poisoning. Also, children should be tested if they are between the ages of 1 and 6 years and have not been tested for lead before.

Who's at risk?

Children under 6 years old and fetuses are at greatest risk of harmful health effects from lead poisoning.

Children who live or spend significant amount of time in pre-1978 housing or buildings with paint in poor condition or undergoing renovation may be exposed. Also, children in publicly supported programs such as Medi-Cal, CHDP and Women, Infant and Children (WIC) are at greater risk.

Children exposed to lead contaminated dust or soil.

Can I protect my child from lead in soil?

If the amount of lead in your soil is too high, and if the soil is not covered with plants, grass or thick ground cover, then you should consider one or more of the following suggestions to make your soil safer.

- Prevent nearby sources of lead from further contaminating the soil; for example, control peeling house paint;
- Plant and maintain grass or other thick ground cover;
- Cover the soil with a thick layer of gravel, wood chips, or other appropriate materials;
- Pave the area;
- Use a planter's box to grow fruits and vegetables in uncontaminated soil; or
- If you do not have any other choices, remove the top 3 to 6 inches of soil and replace it with uncontaminated soil.

To determine if the lead level in your soil is too high, you should use a certified contractor; go to the California Department of Public Health (CDPH) website at www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CCDPHP/DEODC/CLPPB/Pages/LRCcertlist.aspx.

CAUTION: According to the CDPH standard, greater than 400 ppm in the soil of the “play area” is a lead hazard. Before you move soil, call your local landfill for further instructions.

