



# Health Specialist: Lead Poisoning Prevention

**B**ecause children may be exposed to adverse levels of lead without exhibiting clinical symptoms, it's imperative for medical professionals to adopt preventive methods for determining which of their patients are at risk for lead poisoning. Exposure to lead frequently occurs when dust, dirt, or water containing lead is breathed or swallowed.

As a health specialist, you serve an important role in educating parents about the dangers of lead and lead poisoning, as well as informing them of the simple actions they can take to protect their families. Be sure parents of Head Start children receive a copy of EPA's *"Chance of a Lifetime"* brochure. EPA has created a "Home Checklist" to help parents determine if they have lead hazards in their home. If you have time, walk parents through the checklist and remind them to have their children tested for lead poisoning by a medical professional.

## What Can Lead Poisoning Do to Children?

Lead poisoning affects virtually every system in the body, and occurs with little to no distinctive symptoms; however, a child with lead poisoning will often complain of headaches or stomachaches, or may become very irritable and tired.

Lead poisoning in children can cause serious, irreparable damage to their health, including:

- ▶ Central nervous system and kidney damage;
- ▶ Learning disabilities;
- ▶ Lowered intelligence; and
- ▶ Attention Deficit Disorder.

## Children with severely high blood lead levels (BLL) are susceptible to:

- ▶ Coma;
- ▶ Convulsions; and
- ▶ Death.

Head Start requires a blood test for lead when a child enters the program. However, a child should be tested by a medical professional if parents think they have been exposed to lead hazards. It is important to remind parents that a blood test is quick and simple, and young children enrolled in Medicaid and state health programs can receive free lead tests.

## Lead Poisoning Prevention Resources

This information has been taken from EPA's "Lead In Your Home: A Parent's Reference Guide" (EPA 747-K-99-003 May 1999). For a complete copy of this booklet, or for more information, contact The National Lead Information Center at 1-800-424-LEAD (5323) or visit the EPA Lead Web site at [www.epa.gov/lead](http://www.epa.gov/lead).

## Blood Levels and What They Mean

A blood test tells us how much lead a child has been exposed to and the severity of a child's health risk. The chart below explains normal to severe blood lead levels and what steps should be taken if a child is suffering from lead poisoning. Children's blood lead levels rapidly increase from 6 to 12 months of age, and tend to peak at 18 to 24 months. Follow State or local regulations or guidelines as they may be more strict than Federal regulations.

BLL ( $\mu\text{g}/\text{dl}$ )	ACTION
<b>Below 10 <math>\mu\text{g}/\text{dl}</math></b> below 10 micrograms of lead per deciliter of blood	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ If children under the age of six live in pre-1978 housing with peeling or cracking paint, they may need to be re-tested within the same year.</li> </ul>
<b>10 - 14 <math>\mu\text{g}/\text{dl}</math></b> micrograms of lead per deciliter of blood	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ The child may need to be tested again in three to six months.</li> <li>▶ Lead hazards in the home should be identified and removed.</li> </ul>
<b>15 - 19 <math>\mu\text{g}/\text{dl}</math></b> micrograms of lead per deciliter of blood	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ The child will need another blood test in three months.</li> <li>▶ Lead hazards in the home need to found and removed.</li> </ul>
<b>20 - 44 <math>\mu\text{g}/\text{dl}</math></b> micrograms of lead per deciliter of blood	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Make an appointment to confirm the child's lead blood test and to undergo a routine checkup.</li> <li>▶ Make sure to follow the doctor's recommendation for retesting and keep all medical appointments.</li> <li>▶ Lead hazards in the home should be identified and removed.</li> </ul>
<b>Above 44 <math>\mu\text{g}/\text{dl}</math></b> micrograms of lead per deciliter of blood	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ The child needs IMMEDIATE full medical attention.</li> <li>▶ The child may need chelation treatment, which gradually removes lead from the body and should only be administered under the strict supervision of a doctor.</li> <li>▶ Lead hazards in the home should be identified and removed.</li> </ul>



For more information about lead poisoning, visit EPA's Web site at [www.epa.gov/lead](http://www.epa.gov/lead) or call The National Lead Information Center at 1-800-424-LEAD (5323).

