

Lead Poisoning FAQs

What is Blood Lead Level (BLL)?

Blood Lead Level (BLL) measurements indicate the amount of lead mobilized in the blood stream. The BLL does not tell us the total amount of lead stored in the body, nor can it tell us the current or cumulative effects of lead on a person's body. Blood Lead Levels are given in micrograms per deciliter ($\mu\text{g}/\text{dl}$) or micrograms per 100 grams of blood ($\mu\text{g}/100\text{ g}$). These measurements are approximately equal.

What is lead poisoning?

Lead poisoning occurs when lead is in the blood in amounts that can lead to immediate or long term health and developmental problems. Normally, lead poisoning is the result of the accumulation of small amounts of lead over time. However, ingestion of lead—for example, by consuming food stored in ceramics painted with lead-based paint, or by chewing on toys painted with lead-based paint—can lead to acute lead poisoning. Symptoms of acute lead poisoning may include vomiting, loss of balance, a feeling of weakness, and an upset or cramped stomach.

The accumulation of lead in the blood most often is the result of frequent contact with small, often unnoticed, amounts of lead. Lead exposure therefore causes greater risk for a child than an adult. Exposure to lead at low levels may be difficult to detect because the symptoms are often not apparent; a seemingly healthy child may experience undetected changes in brain function and development.

Other health problems associated with lead poisoning include anemia, hearing loss, and renal issues. In addition, lead poisoning causes neurological disorders. If exposure persists, the child may eventually experience symptoms such as headaches, insomnia, and learning disorders.

How can lead poisoning affect my child?

Children can get lead in their bodies by swallowing or breathing in dust that contains lead. In addition, babies and toddlers learn by mouthing objects. If these objects have lead dust on them or contain lead, the child can ingest the lead. Lead is a poison that affects every organ and system in the body. Very high levels of lead exposure can cause coma, seizures and death. Even a little lead can make children slower learners.

Exposure to lead can cause the following:

- Brain damage and lower intelligence levels
- Behavior and learning problems
- Hyperactivity
- Impaired speech and language
- Slowed growth



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- Kidney and liver damage

Lead Poisoning– Continued

What are the symptoms of lead poisoning in children?

Children can be poisoned by lead and may not look or act sick. Many children who are lead poisoned look and act healthy. Sometimes the vague symptoms may be mistaken for other illnesses such as an upset stomach or the flu. Because of this, lead poisoning may go unrecognized. A blood lead test is the only way to find out if a child has lead poisoning. Some possible signs and symptoms of lead poisoning in children are:

- Tiredness or loss of energy
- Hyperactivity
- Irritability or crankiness
- Reduced attention span
- Poor appetite
- Weight loss
- Difficulty sleeping
- Constipation, aches or pains in stomach

What are some common lead exposure sources?

Exposure to lead may occur through many household and occupational sources. The two most common pathways of exposure are ingestion and inhalation. **Dust particles as well as paint chips containing lead can easily be transferred from hand to mouth by infants and toddlers. Houses built before 1978 are more likely to have lead paint. The older the house is, the more likely that the paint inside or outside contains lead. For these houses, lead dust resulting from the degradation of lead-based paint may be a primary source of lead exposure for residents.** Some other potential sources of exposure include the following:

- Soil contaminated with lead
- Older plumbing
- Exposure at work (parents may expose their children by bringing lead home on their clothes)
- Lead fishing sinkers
- Toy jewelry
- Painted furniture
- Imported painted toys
- Brass keys and fixtures
- Alternative medicines from other countries
- Food made or stored in lead-glazed ceramics



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