

# FACTS *for* FAMILIES

No. 45

November 2004

## Lead Exposure in Children Affects Brain and Behavior

Lead exposure is one of the most common preventable poisonings of childhood. Data from the Center for Disease Control (CDC) shows that 6% of all children ages 1-2 years and 11% of black (non-Hispanic) children ages 1-5 years have blood lead levels in the toxic range. Lead is a potent poison that can affect individuals at any age. Children with developing bodies are especially vulnerable because their rapidly developing nervous systems are particularly sensitive to the effects of lead.

Almost all children in the United States are exposed to lead. Common sources include lead paint and lead contained in water and soil. Housing built before 1950 has the greatest risks of containing lead-based paint. Some children may eat or swallow chips of paint (pica) which increases their risk of exposure to lead.

Exposure to lead can have a wide range of effects on a child's development and behavior. Even when exposed to small amounts of lead levels, children may appear inattentive, hyperactive and irritable. Children with greater lead levels may also have problems with learning and reading, delayed growth and hearing loss. At high levels, lead can cause permanent brain damage and even death.

Parents should make sure that their homes are free of lead paint and that the lead level in their drinking water is acceptably low. The Center for Disease Control (CDC) recommends that all children be screened for exposure to lead. A simple and inexpensive blood test can determine whether or not a child has a dangerous level of lead in his or her body. The test can be obtained through a physician, or public health agency.

Early identification and treatment of lead poisoning reduces the risk that children will suffer permanent damage. Treatment begins with removal of the child from the sources of the lead. Medications can remove lead from the body.

For additional information about lead poisoning, contact your physician, county or state Department of Health, or the

Alliance for Healthy Homes  
227 Massachusetts Avenue, NE, Suite 200  
Washington, DC 20002,  
202-543-1147, [www.aeclp.org](http://www.aeclp.org)

## Lead Exposure, “Facts for Families,” No. 45 (11/04)

See also: *Facts for Families*:

[#6 Children Who Can't pay Attention/ADHD](#)

[#16 Children with Learning Disabilities](#)

[#23 Mental Retardation](#)

[#52 Comprehensive Psychiatric Evaluation](#)

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The American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (AACAP) represents over 8,500 child and adolescent psychiatrists who are physicians with at least five years of additional training beyond medical school in general (adult) and child and adolescent psychiatry.

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