Lead Fact Sheet

What is Lead?

Lead is a poisonous metal that our bodies can't use. It was used in paint before it was banned in the United States in 1978. Homes built before 1978 contain lead-based paint. Children under the age of 6 are at greatest risk for lead poisoning.

Lead is mostly found in:

- Dust that is created when home surfaces are scraped, sanded or rubbed together. Paint chips and dust that contain lead can gather on surfaces and objects that people touch or children put in their mouths.
- Ethnic home (folk) remedies like azarcon and pay-loo-ah; and cosmetics, such as kohl, kajal and surma.
- Imported candies and spices.

Children under 6 are at greatest risk for lead poisoning.

How does a child become lead poisoned?

Children become lead poisoned by:

- Eating lead paint chips and soil.
- Chewing on toys or furniture covered in lead paint.
- Eating food prepared in imported pottery.
- Breathing in lead-contaminated dust.

How can I find out if my child is lead poisoned?

The only way to know if your child is lead poisoned is by getting a blood test. Signs of lead poisoning are hard to see, but lead is harmful and can cause:

- Lowered IQ and learning problems.
- Trouble concentrating and behavioral problems.
- Anemia (a disease caused by low iron levels), which can result in tiredness, shortness of breath, and difficulty paying attention.

For more information:
www.cookcountypublichealth.org

/ccdph @cookcohealth

Cook County DEPT. of Public Health
Promoting health. Preventing disease. *Protecting you.*

How Can I Prevent Lead Poisoning?

One of the easiest ways to prevent childhood lead poisoning is to get rid of lead dust and paint chips:

- Wipe down window sills and window wells with soap and water to remove lead dust and paint chips. Wash all toys, pacifiers, bottles, blankets, sheets, rugs and curtains often.
- Teach and practice hand-washing. Have children wash their hands for 20 seconds after playing outside, before eating and before bedtime.
- Take off your shoes when entering your home to keep dust out.

Prepare and eat healthy meals/snacks

Children with empty stomachs absorb more lead than children with full stomachs. Provide your child with four to six small meals during the day. The following nutrients can help protect your child from lead poisoning: Iron, Calcium, Vitamin C and small snacks between meals.

Foods with Iron

Normal levels of iron work to protect the body from the harmful effects of lead.

Good sources of iron include:

- Lean red meats, fish and chicken
- Iron-fortified cereals
- Dried fruits (raisins, prunes)
- Beans
- Tofu

Foods with Vitamin C

Vitamin C and iron-rich foods work together to reduce lead absorption.

Good sources of vitamin C include:

- Oranges, orange juice
- Grapefruits, grapefruit juice
- Tomatoes, tomato juice
- Green peppers

Foods with Calcium

Calcium reduces lead absorption and also helps make teeth and bones strong.

Good calcium sources include:

- Milk
- Yogurt
- Cheese
- Green leafy vegetables (spinach, kale, collard greens)

Examples of small snacks between meals

- Cereal with low-fat milk
- Whole wheat crackers with cheese
- Apple or pear slices, oranges or bananas, fruit smoothies, frozen fruit juice pops.
- Raisins
- Yogurt