

INFORMATION SHEET ON LEAD SCREENING

INTRODUCTION: Lead is a metal found naturally in soil and some water sources. It is also used in some manufacturing processes and commercial products such as batteries, solder, and lead weights.

Recent studies have shown that even low levels of increased lead in children can have long-term effects on growth and physical and cognitive development.

SOURCES OF LEAD: For children the most common sources of increased lead is through eating small amounts of dirt and dust. Since many paints made before 1960 were high in lead, older housing with peeling paint and active renovation may increase lead exposure. Lead may be airborne and carried on clothing, so families living near lead usage industries and those with employment using lead products may be more at risk.

SCREENING: The best way to protect your child is to have them screened for an increased lead level in their blood. Although higher levels may cause acute symptoms (such as vomiting, irritability, loss of appetite), children with lower levels that may effect development usually have no obvious symptoms. The screening test is done with a fingerstick sample, and is recommended at age 1, 2, and anytime there is question of increased risk.

PRECAUTIONS: All children may be helped with these measures:

1. Check your house for peeling paint. Keep children away from renovation or cleaning projects with sanding and dust production.
2. Wet mop or wet wipe hard surfaces weekly, vacuum rugs weekly.
3. Wash hands, face before each meal; keep nails trimmed and clean of dirt.
4. Wash toys and pacifiers frequently, especially those used in soil.
5. Discourage chewing on non-food items (pica).
6. Store and dispose of lead products such as lead storage batteries, lead weights (fishing sinkers) properly.

WATER SOURCES: Municipal water supplies are tested frequently and are safe. Some houses have lead pipes or solder that may leach lead into the water. There are private companies that test water lead levels. A common sense approach is to have your children screened and then do more extensive home testing only if higher lead levels are confirmed.

CONCLUSIONS: Lead screening is another preventative measure that can help to protect your child's development. Although small increased lead levels should not be cause for panic, appropriate screening and simple home avoidance measures can help to provide an optimal environment for your child's health.