

To *Your* HEALTH *Fresno County*

Bringing you public health issues and ways to improve personal, family, neighborhood and community health



Get the Lead Out Fresno County

October 13, 2015

A seldom considered, but persisting, serious and significant public health problem in the United States is lead poisoning (sometimes referred to as plumbism). National Lead Poisoning Prevention Week (October 25 –31) gives us the opportunity to make everyone aware of this threat.

Lead is a very common heavy metal used extensively in automobile fuel (until 1985) and paints (until 1978) that poisons by inhibiting a wide variety of cellular functions, especially those requiring calcium (which the lead replaces). It affects a multitude of organs and body systems resulting in a wide range of [symptoms](#) and adverse effects including behavior and attention problems, failure at school, hearing problems, kidney damage, reduced IQ, slowed body growth, abdominal pain, aggressive behavior, anemia, headaches, decreased appetite, and fatigue. Very high levels of lead in the body can result in vomiting, muscle weakness, seizures, coma, and even death.

There is no identified safe blood lead level for children. Even low levels have been known to affect IQ, ability to pay attention, and academic achievement. These effects cannot be corrected.

Even though lead has been removed from automobile fuels and paints, the CDC estimates that 500,000 children between the ages of 1 and 5 have blood lead levels over 5 mcg/dl. Most of this exposure is from paint chips and paint dust from pre-1978 homes. Exposures can also occur from soil contaminated in the past with leaded fuel exhaust (particularly near highways and urban areas), hobby and occupational exposures, lead soldered plumbing fixtures, lead contaminated consumer products (such as toys and pottery), old cribs, and some imported foods.

Risk factors for lead poisoning include age under 6 (esp. 1 to 2 years old), living in pre-1978 housing (especially those with paint that is in poor condition), low income, pica behavior (ingestion of non-food items), and exposure to contaminated consumer products.

Measures to prevent lead poisoning include:

- Making sure your child does not have access to peeling paint or chewable surfaces painted with lead based paint
- Preventing your child from playing in bare soil
- Getting rid of all toys possibly painted with lead paint
- Avoiding canned goods from foreign countries
- Being wary of lead in traditional folk remedies, cosmetics, and imported foods ([especially candies](#))
- [Showering and changing clothes](#) after finishing work or hobby activities with lead based products
- Regularly washing your children's hands and toys
- Having everyone wash their hands before eating
- Not storing wine, spirits, or vinegar based salad dressing in lead crystal for long periods of time
- Keeping your house as dust free as possible, particularly window sills that may contain lead paint dust
- Taking off shoes when entering the home to prevent lead contaminated soil from entering
- Letting tap water run for a minute before drinking or cooking with it (to avoid wasting water, especially in drought conditions, this water can be collected and used to water plants not used for food and away from children play areas)
- Only using cold water for drinking, cooking, and baby formula

Because the early effects of lead poisoning are difficult to detect, the only way of knowing if a child is being affected by exposure to lead is to test for lead in the blood. Both the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the American Academy of Pediatrics recommend targeted screening of all Medicaid enrolled and eligible children, as well as those born outside the United States. The Advisory Committee on Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention recommends that all children enrolled in Medicaid be screened at 12 and 24 months of age or at 36 to 72 months if not previously screened.

Screening for any child who resides, plays, or spends time in a home built prior to 1978 may be appropriate. Families should discuss their risk factors with their medical provider to determine the need for testing.

The FCDPH Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Program ([CLPPP](#)) works to educate local medical providers and families on the importance of having children tested for lead and serves lead poisoned children and their families in Fresno County. Services include case management by a Public Health Nurse, home inspection to possibly locate the source of the lead by Environmental staff, and education on lead poisoning/prevention from Health Education staff.

Click on the links below to learn more

Brochures and information

www.cdph.ca.gov/programs/clppb

<http://www.webmd.com/children/tc/lead-poisoning-topic-overview>

Guidelines and policies

<http://www.cdc.gov/nceh/lead/>

Lead prevention

<http://www2.epa.gov/lead>

Items recalled due to lead and other hazardous material

<http://www.cpsc.gov/>

Healthy homes and lead information

http://portal.hud.gov/hudportal/HUD?src=/program_offices/healthy_homes/healthyhomes/lead

Learn what parents can do

http://www.cdc.gov/nceh/lead/acclpp/blood_lead_levels.htm

Interesting history of lead poisoning

<http://corrosion-doctors.org/Elements-Toxic/Lead-history.htm>

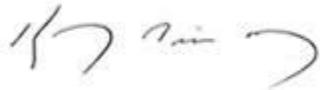
Politics surrounding lead poisoning

<http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/2013/mar/21/lead-poisoning-ignored-scandal/>

I would like to hear from you. What choices are you making to improve the health of your family and community? Who do you know that is a Champion for Health? Email me at

ToYourHealth@co.fresno.ca.us.

Here's to your health!



Dr. Ken Bird, Fresno County Health Officer

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