

Childhood Lead Poisoning

Lead poisoning is the number one environmental health threat to children in the U.S. Nationwide, one in every 11 children between the ages of 1 and 5 has an elevated blood level for lead.

Lead poisoning can cause children to have problems with reading, attention and motor coordination. They may also have behavioral problems.

The most common cause of lead poisoning in young children is house dust that is contaminated with lead from lead paint. Although lead paint has been banned for use in homes since 1960 in New York City and since 1978 in the rest of New York State and the country, most older housing has at least some old layers of lead paint.

Nationally, 20% of all housing built between 1959 and 1974 has some lead paint; 70% of housing built between 1940 and 1959 has some lead paint; and 99% of housing built before 1940 has some lead paint.

If lead paint is chipping, peeling or flaking, it can be ground into dust. Lead paint on the sliding parts of windows may be ground up into dust when you open or close the windows. Any lead-painted surface that gets worn away as it is used (door edges, door jambs, cabinet door edges) or worn away when it is walked on (painted floors and stair steps) can be a source of lead-contaminated house dust.

Testing Your Children For Lead Poisoning

Preschool-aged children are most at risk of becoming poisoned by lead, for several reasons:

- Young children tend to have higher exposures to lead. Lead-contaminated dust can get on the children's hands or toys and then into their mouths. When this happens repeatedly, it adds up to potentially dangerous lead exposure.
- Young children may absorb into their bodies *four times* more of the lead they swallow than an adult swallowing the same amount of lead.
- Also, young children are more susceptible to the effects of lead because they are still rapidly growing and developing.

New York State Department of Health regulations require lead screening of *all* children under six years of age. Medicaid pays for this testing for enrolled children between 6 months and 6 years old.

If your child doesn't have a regular doctor, or if you don't have health insurance that covers blood lead testing, you may be able to get the test done for free, or at low cost. Contact your local health department for information. (Consult the local government listings under "Health Department" in the blue pages of your phone directory.)

Lead Screening Tests

Most children being exposed to dangerous levels of lead have no obvious symptoms. *The only way to be sure that your children don't have lead poisoning is to get them tested.*

Under New York State Health law, your child's doctor must assess your child's risk of lead poisoning, and talk with you about lead hazards. Even if the doctor finds that your child's risk is low, a blood test must be done at around one year of age and again at about two years of age. Testing may need to be done more often than this if the doctor finds that your child is at high risk.

Be sure to ask the doctor about the test result, because different lead levels call for different responses. Lead levels of 20 micrograms of lead per deciliter of blood (20 *ug*/dl) or more require further action to identify the exact source of your child's lead exposure and to reduce or eliminate the exposure.

If your child's lead level is only mildly elevated (from 10 to 19 *ug*/dl), the doctor should tell you about foods to include in your child's diet that can help protect your child from lead poisoning. (For example, children who don't get enough calcium and/or iron in their diet can absorb more lead into their bodies than children who receive adequate amounts of these minerals.)

The doctor should also suggest various housekeeping and other measures that can reduce your child's exposure to lead, and continue to monitor your child's lead level.

Sources of Additional Information

New York State Attorney General's Office

Free copies of the following publications are available for downloading at the Attorney General's website, or call **1-800-771-7755**:

Look Out for Lead! A Guide for Tenants

www.ag.ny.gov/bureaus/environment/lead96.html

Lead Paint in Your Home? Know Your Rights!

<http://www.ag.ny.gov/bureaus/environment/LeadPaintBrochure.PDF>

Lead Paint: Your Rights and Responsibilities

www.ag.ny.gov/realestate/lead_paint.html

General information about childhood lead poisoning, answers to frequently asked questions, and a variety of free publications are available from the following organizations:

New York State Department of Health

Bureau of Child & Adolescent Health

(518) 473-4602

<http://www.health.state.ny.us/environmental/lead/index.htm>

New York City Department of Health

Division of Lead Poisoning Control

Lead Poisoning Prevention Program

(212) BAN-LEAD

(212) 442-1820 for hearing impaired persons

<http://home2.nyc.gov/html/doh/html/lead/lead.shtml>

National Lead Information Hotline and Clearing House

(800) 424-LEAD

TDD Number (800) 526-5456 for hearing-impaired persons

<http://www.epa.gov/lead/pubs/nlic.htm>

Alliance for Healthy Homes

(202) 543-1147

<http://www.afhh.org/>

Dear Fellow New Yorker:

Our children are our most important resource. I know I feel that way about my own three children. Protecting their health should be our priority. Some threats to their health are not easy to see. Lead poisoning is one such threat.



According to the federal Centers for Disease Control, childhood lead poisoning is one of the most common and yet also one of the most preventable children's health problems today.

Even at low levels, exposure to lead can cause serious and permanent damage to the health of young children.

Virtually all preschool age children are at some risk of lead poisoning. Because lead poisoning is usually discovered only by testing, having your preschool-age children tested is vital.

If you haven't yet had your children screened for lead poisoning, I urge you to do it soon. My office has prepared this brochure to help you obtain this important testing for your child.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Eric Schneiderman". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Eric T. Schneiderman
Attorney General

Protecting Your Children From Lead Poisoning



Eric T. Schneiderman
Attorney General

**Environmental Protection
Bureau**

Social Justice Division

August 2007