

ARE WE PROTECTED FROM LEAD EXPOSURE?

One would think we are safe from lead exposure. Lead comes from the earth's surface. It has no taste or smell, but through human activities like mining, manufacturing and the burning of fossil fuels, lead still exists and poses a health hazard to some extent. Lead levels have been drastically reduced by no longer using it in residential paints, gasoline, water pipes and other products. Although lead has been taken out of household paints, it still remains in some industrial paints, which workers have guidelines in dealing with them. The most common sources of lead poisoning in U.S. children are from deteriorated lead-based paint in the older homes resulting in high levels of lead contaminated house dust. According to the CDC, lead paint is present in an estimated 24 million U.S. homes. Also more than 4 million of these are homes have one or more young children living in them.

Lead may be toxic to your tissues and especially dangerous to a child's nervous system. Since the accumulation of lead toxicity is gradual, dangerous levels may cause serious problems like, lower intelligence and poor school performance in children. Other signs and symptoms in children are irritability, loss of appetite, weight loss, sluggishness, abdominal pain, vomiting or constipation. Also complications besides involving the nervous system, excessive exposure could lead to kidney damage. There also may be speech, language and behavior problems, along with poor muscle coordination and possibly hearing damage. In adults, signs and symptoms might be tingling of the extremities, muscular weakness, abdominal pain, headache or even memory loss. Complications could lead to high blood pressure, digestive problems, and nerve disorders along with memory and concentration problems. There also could be muscle and joint pain or even cataracts that develop in the adult.

There are many different sources that lead to lead contamination. Household dust may also contain lead if the house was built before 1978 and was possibly painted then with lead based paints. In the older homes, lead pipes, brass plumbing fixtures and copper pipes were possibly soldered with lead that could release particles. In 1980's Congress

changed the Safe Drinking Water Act to restrict use of lead in the pipes. Other concerns about lead may come from ceramics or porcelain coming from another country, which possibly contain lead in their glazes. There are numerous products that come from foreign countries that may also contain lead. Another surprising fact was that Kohl, a traditional cosmetic found in eyeliner, frequently revealed high levels of lead.

The most susceptible to lead are babies and children because they have a tendency to put things in their mouths and the lead is more easily absorbed into their developing bodies. There is a blood test that the Dr can do to determine if the child has been exposed to lead. “The CDC recommends that your child be tested for lead at 6 months then yearly if your home contains lead paint, or if you’re exposed to lead at work or use lead in your hobby.”

If you are found to have high lead levels in the blood, after identifying the source, stop the exposure. This will help reduce the lead level. To reduce potential lead level hazards, have a professional check your home for lead by doing an inspection along with a risk assessment. There are home lead tests that an individual can do but the EPA doesn’t recommend them because they may not be reliable.

To help reduce your risk level for lead be sure you and your family wash your hands after playing, before eating, after the restroom or playing with animals. Also serve meals high with calcium and iron because good nutrition helps prevent lead absorption in your child’s body. If you have old water pipes, let your water run for at least a minute before using. If your home has old paint, don’t sand because that stirs up the dust that might release lead particles that could be inhaled. Some people think that if they heat the paint it will come off easier. If the paint gets too hot then fumes can be inhaled, so don’t use too high of heat when removing paint. Remember to wear protective clothing if you are going to be remodeling an old house. Protect yourself and others.

As always if you have any questions or comments, eMail me at gheffelmire@dearborncounty.in.gov

