



Preventing Lead Poisoning

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Dangers of Lead Poisoning

As a child care provider, you are a critical link in helping to reduce lead poisoning—a serious but preventable health problem. You are not only an educator of young children but also a source of information for their parents and guardians.

Lead is a poison that is especially harmful to the developing brains and nervous systems of unborn babies, infants, and children under six years old. Young children are at greater risk than adults are because youngsters are more sensitive to lead's damaging effects and because children put objects in their mouths. If these objects contain lead or have lead dust on them, the lead can poison the children.

No amount of lead in the body is safe. Even very low levels of lead can cause permanent behavior and learning problems. These problems are associated with reading difficulties, poor vocabulary, attention problems, and greater school absenteeism later in life. Very high lead levels, which are now rare, can cause coma, convulsions, and even death.

Sources of Lead Poisoning

The major source of lead poisoning is dust and flakes from lead-based paint. Lead paint was banned for use in homes in 1978, and you should assume that homes built **before 1978** contain lead paint (unless testing has shown otherwise). If lead paint is disturbed during home repairs, or if old paint weathers, dangerous lead dust may be created. This dust, which collects on children's toys or hands, can be swallowed.

Lead can also come from other sources, including drinking water from lead pipes and solder, some children's jewelry, old or imported painted toys, imported pottery, contaminated soil and the food grown in it, and some cosmetics and folk remedies.

The only way to tell if a child has lead poisoning is through a blood test. As a child care provider, encourage the parents and guardians of children between one and two years old to have them screened, especially if they live in older homes. Three to six-year-old children, who live in older homes and are not tested, should be screened, as well. Testing may be done through a local doctor, health clinic, or health department.

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To prevent lead poisoning, child care facilities, homes, and other places where children play or spend a lot of time should be tested. Dust, loose paint chips, soil, dishes, and water can all be tested for lead. State and local health departments can provide information about how to test and what to do if dangerous levels are found.

In Connecticut, certain lead regulations apply to licensed daycare facilities. For more information about these regulations and other lead poisoning questions, check the Connecticut Department of Public Health's website at www.dph.state.ct.us/BRS/Lead/lead_program.htm. Additional information for childcare providers, entitled *What You Should Know about Lead Poisoning: A Resource Manual for Child Care Providers*, is available in English and Spanish at www.hec.uconn.edu/adults.html.

