

# Pregnancy and Lead Poisoning

## Protect Yourself, Protect Your Baby

### A pregnant woman who has lead in her body can pass it to her unborn baby.

Lead can harm a pregnant woman and her baby. A woman can breathe in or swallow lead before or during her pregnancy. Lead that is absorbed into the body can be stored in a person's bones for years. When a woman becomes pregnant, the lead that she may currently be exposed to and the lead stored in her bones gets into the blood stream and can be passed to the baby. Lead can also be in breast milk.



### Lead can harm unborn babies.

Elevated lead levels can cause:

- High blood pressure in a pregnant woman
- Babies born too soon or too small
- Miscarriage and stillbirth
- Lower IQs in children
- Learning and behavior problems in children
- Slow growth in children
- Poor hearing in children

### Warning Signs and Symptoms

Often lead poisoning has **NO** symptoms. When present, symptoms may include: headache, mood changes, abdominal pain, extra tiredness or weakness, loss of appetite, a metal taste in the mouth, sleeplessness, muscle and joint pain/soreness, stomach pain/discomfort, constipation, weight loss, nausea, small tremors, nervousness or anxiety, irritability, hyperactivity, extra pale skin, numbness, dizziness, anemia, and high blood pressure. Similar symptoms may occur during a normal pregnancy. Talk to your health care provider.



### Where is lead found?

Here are some places lead may be found in your home:

**Paint and dust:** Many homes built before 1978 have lead paint. The paint can chip, peel and make dust that has lead. Lead dust can also be made from scraping, sanding, and disturbing lead paint during remodeling, repainting, and repairs.

**Water:** Although less common, lead can get into tap water if the plumbing is made with lead.

**Soil:** Lead may be in the soil around some homes.

**Examples of other places to find lead:**

working with or around lead; fishing weights, bullets, artist's paint, antiques, and stained glass; home or folk remedies such as alkohl, azarcón, bali goli, ghazard, greta, pay-loo-ah; pottery, crystal and ceramic dishes; plastic window blinds made outside the U.S.; imported food and candy; calcium supplements; cosmetics and hair dyes; and jewelry.

### Get tested for lead poisoning.

Talk to your health care provider. Tell him or her if you think you were ever exposed to lead in your lifetime. Get a blood lead test if you are pregnant or planning to get pregnant or are planning to breastfeed. Ask your health care provider what your test results mean.

## What you can do to protect yourself and your unborn baby



Lead poisoning can be prevented. Here are some tips to help protect yourself and your baby from lead while you are pregnant and after your baby is born:

- **Get early prenatal care.** See your health care provider when you are planning to become pregnant and as soon as you think you are pregnant. Talk to him or her about what you can do to prevent lead poisoning. Continue to see him or her regularly.
- **Don't remove lead yourself.** Hire experts who are certified in lead paint abatement, which is the process of safely reducing lead paint hazards.
- **Stay away during lead paint removal or remodeling.** Also keep children away.
- **Have your water tested for lead.** If you think your water might have lead, use only cold water for cooking, drinking, and making baby formula. Run the water for one minute before using it.
- **Have someone wash floors, windowsills, and other dusty places with a wet mop or wet cloth.** This should be done at least once a week. This will keep lead dust under control. Do NOT vacuum or sweep hard surfaces because this will spread the dust.
- **Wash your hands often.** Always wash your hands before cooking and eating. Wear gloves when gardening or working in the yard. Then wash your hands when you are done.
- **Replace plastic miniblinds with ones that are non-toxic or lead-free.**
- **Don't use products that have lead.** Be aware that some folk remedies, cosmetics, food, candy, and other products made outside the U.S. have lead.
- **Stay away from hobbies that use lead.** Examples of hobbies that use lead are making stained glass and refinishing furniture. Read labels on paints and other arts and crafts materials to make sure they don't have lead.
- **If you work around lead, talk to your health care provider and your supervisor.** Find out how you can lower the amount of lead you take into your body. Follow all safety rules at work. Be careful not to bring lead home on clothes, shoes, skin, hair, or other items. Make sure other family members who work with lead do the same.
- **Cook, store, and serve food and drinks in clean plastic or glass containers.** Don't use crystal, ceramic pottery, and silver or pewter dishes.
- **Eat healthy foods every day.** Good nutrition can help you and your baby take in less lead. Eat regular meals. Cut down on fatty foods, such as fried foods, potato chips and pastries. Eat foods with calcium, iron, vitamin C, and zinc. Some foods with calcium are salmon, tofu, peanuts, green leafy vegetables such as spinach, and low-fat or nonfat milk, cheese, or yogurt. Some foods with iron are lean meats, beans, oatmeal, raisins, prunes, kale, and bread and cereal with added iron. Some foods with vitamin C are oranges, grapefruits, kiwi, tomatoes, bell peppers, strawberries, and broccoli. Some foods with zinc are beef, dark meat chicken and turkey, chickpeas, cashews, and almonds.
- **Don't use tobacco or drugs.** Tobacco and illegal drugs may contain lead and other harmful substances. Use of these products by a pregnant woman can harm the health of her unborn child.

For more information about lead poisoning and pregnancy, talk to your health care provider, your local health department, the National Lead Information Center at 1-800-424-LEAD (1-800-424-5323), or the:

**Missouri Department of Health & Senior Services**

Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Program

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[www.health.mo.gov/lead](http://www.health.mo.gov/lead)

