



Minimising the health risks of lead

June 2011

How can I prevent exposure to lead?

If you know or suspect that there are lead tailings; the left-over materials from mined lead, or any other forms of lead, on your property, you can avoid exposure and minimise lead absorption by taking a few simple precautions:

Restrict access to lead

- Avoid areas that may be contaminated with lead. You might need to fence-off contaminated areas to restrict access.
- Cover or seal lead tailings or contaminated soil. Depending on the location and how often the area is used, consider sealing the contaminated area with concrete, paving or gravel.
- If soil contains lead, consider covering it with a layer of clean-fill and planting grass to restrict contact with your family and pets.

Keep dust out

- Avoid walking lead dust or dirt into your home by placing durable mats at all entrances. Regularly clean the mats. Leave work boots and yard shoes outside.
- Empty vacuum bags and dust collected from floors, pathways and mats into a plastic bag while outside before placing the waste in an external bin.
- Close all doors and windows when you leave the house, and on windy days, to prevent dust from entering your home.
- Seal cracks in the ceilings of older homes. If there is a source of lead near your house, lead dust may fall through these cracks into living areas.

Focus on personal and home hygiene

- Regular hand-washing can reduce a child's absorption of lead. Wash hands whenever you come inside from the garden, or other possible lead-affected areas; before you eat or drink; and after touching pets. Use soap and water every time, and make sure hands are dry as damp hands will pick up lead dust. Regularly brush under fingernails and keep them neat and short.
- Regularly mop and wipe hard surfaces, bench tops, furniture, toys and window sills (especially areas where children have access). Rinse cloths and mops frequently.



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- Effective regular vacuuming is recommended. High efficiency particulate air (HEPA) vacuum cleaners will prevent dust being re-released back into your home.
- Wash children's toys thoroughly with soapy water if they have been outside, especially toys and dummies (pacifiers) that are likely to be put in a child's mouth. Special precautions are necessary for plush toys that are difficult to wash daily.
- Wash family pets frequently and do not let them sleep on beds or furniture.
- Remove any contaminated clothing before entering the home. Remove as much dirt or dust as possible from clothes and keep them in a plastic bag until they can be washed separately.
- Wash home-grown vegetables thoroughly before eating or cooking them.

Eat plenty of healthy food

- Eating a healthy, balanced diet with adequate levels of calcium, iron, vitamin C, zinc and magnesium helps to minimise lead absorption. Good sources of iron include poultry, red meat, liver, fish, fortified cereal, cooked beans/lentils, and green leafy vegetables. Milk, cheese and yoghurt are good sources of calcium.
- Avoid high-fat diets as they increase lead absorption.
- Young children need frequent meals and snacks - a child with an empty stomach can absorb seven times more lead than a child that has eaten.

If you are concerned that you or a member of your family may have been exposed to lead from soil or tailings, contact your doctor to discuss a blood test to determine lead levels.

Consider other sources of lead

Lead tailings are only one possible source of lead around your home. Information on additional sources is available at: www.public.health.wa.gov.au/3/1141/2/lead.pm

Queries on lead?

For health-related queries, contact the Department of Health's Toxicology Section on (08) 9388 4999. The Public Health Physician based in the MidWest is also available on (08) 9956 1978.

For queries on the environmental impacts of lead, contact the Department of Environment and Conservation's Contaminated Sites Branch on 1300 762 982.



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Other Useful Information

The following links provide information on minimising exposure and absorption of lead from the environment, areas with older homes where lead-based paint is more common, and from living near lead mines or smelters:

- Mt Isa, “Living with Lead”: www.livingwithlead.com.au/
- Port Pirie, “Tenby 10” was a program aimed to promote positive behaviour and minimise uptake of lead, in order to reduce blood lead levels below 10µg/dl by 2010: www.tenby10.com/Index
- US EPA (2011) “Lead-free Kids Website”: www.leadfreekids.org

