

# PHMDC: Talk to your child's health care provider about lead poisoning

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While the United States banned lead from paint in the 1970s, it is still found in the environment and poses a threat to children's health. A blood test is the only way to know if a child has been poisoned by lead and delays in testing due to the pandemic may have left some children more vulnerable to lead poisoning.

Public Health Madison & Dane County urges parents to talk to their children's health care provider about testing for lead poisoning.

"There is no safe level of lead exposure for kids, and we don't want to see a single child be poisoned. Even low levels of lead can cause issues with lower IQ and learning problems, hyperactivity, slowed growth, and more," says John Hausbeck, Environmental Health Supervisor for Public Health. "Parents should ask their kids' health care provider if lead testing is recommended. If their child doesn't have health insurance, they should call us at (608) 266-4821 so we can help them arrange a test," continues Hausbeck.

Anyone can get lead poisoning, but children between six months and six years of age who live in or visit housing built before 1978 are at highest risk.

Lead poisoning is caused by swallowing or breathing lead. Most children get lead poisoning from paint dust in homes built before 1978. They can get invisible lead dust on their hands and toys. Then, when they put their hands or toys in their mouth, they can get lead poisoning.

“In 2020, our staff assisted the families of 56 Dane County children who had lead poisoning,” says Hausbeck. “We work with families when a child is poisoned to be sure they’re getting the care and follow up they need. We also give guidance on remediating any sources of lead in the home,” continues Hausbeck. “Since there are often no signs that a child has been poisoned by lead, prevention and testing are the keys to keeping kids healthy.”

Since lead poisoning is preventable, if a child lives in or often visits pre-1978 housing, it’s important to take precautions to prevent exposure to lead.

Precautions include:

- [Test water](#) if you aren’t sure if there are lead pipes leading into or in your home.
- [Test paint and varnish](#) on old surfaces of your home.
- [Carefully cleaning floors and windows](#) to clean up lead dust.
- Washing children’s hands often, especially before eating.
- Covering chipped or peeling paint.
- Using cold tap water for drinking, cooking, and making infant formula.
- [Feeding children foods high in iron and calcium](#), which help reduce lead absorption. Adding foods high in vitamin C helps the body absorb the iron and calcium.
- [Finding lead hazards in your home before you sand, paint, or renovate.](#)

By federal law, people renting or buying a home built before 1978 must be informed by the landlord of lead hazards before a lease is signed. It is illegal to be evicted or harassed for complaining about lead. Public Health staff can assist if information was not provided about possible lead hazards in an apartment or home.

By taking precautions to prevent exposure to lead and making sure children at risk of poisoning get the screening needed, lead poisoning can be avoided.