

Lead Poisoning Quicksheet

July 2023

Background

Lead is a naturally occurring metal. Lead is found in older house paint. Lead can build up in house dust and soil. Lead is found in many products, including batteries and ammunition.

Lead poisoning occurs when lead builds up in the body. Even at low levels, lead can cause serious harm.

Lead poisoning can affect people of all ages. Adults may be exposed to lead from certain occupations or hobbies. Children under the age of 6 and pregnant women are especially at risk because the developing nervous system is very sensitive to lead.

What are the effects of lead poisoning?

The effects of lead poisoning in children can include:

- Damage to the brain and nervous system
- Slowed growth and development
- Learning and behavior problems
- Hearing and speech problems

This can cause:

- Lower IQ
- Decreased ability to pay attention
- Underperformance in school

How do we test for lead exposure?

A blood test can determine the presence of lead in a child.

- A capillary sample (finger or heel stick) is the fastest way to provide results but is usually followed by a second test. If lead is on the skin during a capillary test, it can produce higher levels in the blood, creating a false test.
- A venous blood draw takes blood from the child's vein, but it must be analyzed at a laboratory. Blood is less likely to be contaminated during this type of draw.

Who is most at risk for lead poisoning?

- People in households built before 1978
- People in low-income households
- Children under 6
- Immigrant and refugee children
- Pregnant people
- People in households involved in lead-related hobbies or occupations

What should families know?

The most important step in protecting children and other vulnerable individuals from lead poisoning is prevention.

Help is available for families in Delaware County to test for and address lead hazards in their homes. Please visit the links below for more information.

Most children who have lead poisoning do not look or act sick. The only way to know if a child has lead poisoning is to get a blood lead test. Families should ask their healthcare provider to test their child for lead. Blood lead testing for children enrolled in Medicaid is covered. Many private insurance policies also cover the cost of blood lead testing.

Families can reach out to the Delaware County Health Department if they have questions about lead exposure, environmental lead testing in their home, or need help obtaining a blood lead test for a child.

More Information

<https://delcopa.gov/health/pages/lead.html>

<https://delcopa.gov/hcd/LHRP.html>

<https://caadc.org/services/healthy-homes-and-economic-development-initiatives/>