

What To Do if Your Home Has Lead Hazards

If lead hazards are inside or outside your home — usually from old lead paint — this is a threat to your children's health!

Lead can poison your children. It can hurt their intelligence, cause behavior problems and make it harder for them to learn in school.

Children become poisoned because old, peeling lead paint produces paint chips and lead dust. This usually-invisible dust settles on floors, toys and other surfaces. The lead dust gets on children's hands and then into their mouths.

If your home has lead hazards, they must be fixed safely to protect your child.

The Property Owner Must Fix Lead Hazards

- If you own your home**, you need to have lead hazards fixed safely. Skip over the next part about working with landlords.
- If you rent your home**, your landlord is responsible for keeping your property safe. He or she has a duty to fix lead hazards.

Getting Your Landlord to Fix the Hazard

If you rent your home, you need to decide how hard to push your landlord to make repairs. As a first step, you can show your landlord the Sampling Results Report and lab reports. These prove that there is a lead hazard in your home.

Good landlords want to know about problems like this, so they can solve them before they get worse. HUD and EPA can fine landlords who know about lead hazards for not telling tenants.

If your landlord fails to fix the hazard, you can do several things to pressure him or her to take action. You can:

- Complain to your city or county Health Department or Code Agency.
- Complain to your city or county Housing Authority, if your family has Section 8 or other federal housing assistance.
- Work with the community organization that checked your home and get together with other tenants to push for safe housing.

- You can also get legal advice. Some families have sued their landlords for medical costs and other damages caused by lead hazards.

Safely Repair Peeling Paint

The property owner — whether that is you or your landlord — must see that **deteriorated paint is repaired safely by properly-trained people.**

That is because if peeling paint is not fixed properly, it can make things worse! For example, scraping and sanding lead paint can spread lots of lead dust around and poison children.

In addition, anything that causes paint to deteriorate needs to be fixed — things like water leaks and sticking doors and windows. It does little good to repair the paint without fixing these problems.

In some cases, a certified lead abatement contractor may be needed. In other cases, painters trained in safe work practices can do the job safely.

Whoever repairs the paint, make sure they don't spread lead dust on the floor or your belongings. All paint repair work must follow these safeguards:

- The work area should be sealed off.** Floors, doors, windows, vents and furniture should be tightly covered with heavy plastic that is taped down. No child or pregnant woman should be in the work area.
- No dangerous paint removal methods should be used:**
 - **No** open flame torches or heat guns operating above 1100°F. Burning lead paint can create poisonous fumes.
 - **No** power sanding (unless the sander has a HEPA vacuum attachment). Power sanding and power washing can spread dangerous lead dust all around.
 - **No** chemical paint strippers that contain methylene chloride.
 - **No** dry scraping or sanding of large areas. Spray misting with water before scraping helps keep dust down.
- All dust and paint chips must be cleaned up.** Workers should clean as they work and wet wash at the end. They should:
 - Carefully roll up or fold plastic sheets to catch dust and chips.

- Use a vacuum with a HEPA filter to clean all floors and other surfaces
- Wash floors, walls, and sills with detergent and rinse with fresh water.
- Throw out all trash, towels and plastic sheets in heavy plastic bags.
- Clean or remove shoes to avoid tracking lead dust around your home.

❑ The job has not been done right if:

- You can see any deteriorated paint;
- You can see any trash, dust, or paint chips;
- Painted doors or windows rub or stick; or
- The cause of any water damage has not been fixed.

Be Careful About Repairing Peeling Paint Yourself

You should think twice before trying to fix lead hazards yourself, even if your landlord offers to buy new paint. If you decide to do the repairs and repaint yourself, you need to learn and follow all the steps to protect against lead dust. To do this, you can:

- ❑ Attend a good one-day training — the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) "Lead-Safe Remodeling and Renovation."
- ❑ Get and read a good booklet that gives clear tips — *Lead Paint Safety: A Field Guide for Painting, Home Maintenance, and Renovation Work*. You can get a free copy in English or Spanish by calling toll-free, 1-800-424-LEAD.
- ❑ Contact the community organization that checked your home for hazards — it may have copies of the *Lead Paint Safety* booklet or information about training courses.

Cleaning Up Lead Dust

Lead dust is often invisible, sticky and hard to clean up. Sweeping with a broom and dustpan won't work — it just stirs the dust around.

The best way to clean up lead dust and paint chips is to vacuum first and then wet mop with hot water and a good detergent. It helps to mop using two buckets — one for the soapy water and one for the rinse water. Change the rinse water often.

Sometimes old dirty rugs and carpets can contain dangerous lead dust. Think about throwing them out, as bare floors are much easier to keep clean.

The only way to be sure the dust hazard is corrected is to have a dust wipe taken and sent in for lab analysis. The community organization that checked your home for hazards may be able to check again to be sure no lead dust hazards are left behind.

If your home still has peeling paint, cleaning up lead dust only helps for a short while. Fixing the peeling paint is the only way to stop more dust from collecting.

Controlling Lead Hazards in Soil

Bare soil with high lead levels can be a danger to children. Children can get poisoned with lead from playing outdoors and lead dust can be tracked inside on people's shoes.

The ground outside many homes is contaminated with lead from peeling paint on outside walls. If exterior paint is peeling, it needs to be safely repaired to cut off the source.

Any bare soil outside your home should also be covered with sod, mulch, or gravel to reduce the hazard. If lead levels are very high, clean soil may need to be brought in or the soil removed.

Focus first on your children's play area. For example, a sandbox with clean sand makes a safe place to play.

A floor mat inside the door can help reduce lead dust from being tracked in. It can be even better for you, your children and all visitors to take off their shoes inside the front door.

Watch Out for Lead Hazards in the Future

Here are some other ways to help protect your child from lead poisoning:

- Always be on the lookout for peeling paint and things that cause paint to peel. Water leaks and moisture are the main cause of peeling paint. Sticking doors and windows can also damage paint.
- Try to avoid spreading lead dust in your housekeeping. It is much better to use a wet mop than to sweep with a broom.
- Washing children's hands also helps, especially before meals, before bed and after outdoor play, because it helps keep lead dust out of their mouths.

- Good food with lots of calcium, iron, and vegetables helps children grow strong and healthy, and reduces the amount of lead their bodies absorb.
- If you are concerned about lead poisoning and your child, ask your doctor or clinic for a blood lead test.
- Talk with friends and neighbors about lead hazards in all your homes. Lead poisoning is not just your problem. Families need to unite to protect their children. Organizations in your community can help bring families together to solve this problem once and for all.
- If you move, look for a home or apartment that is in good shape without peeling paint.