

Lead Exposure

FACTS:

- Lead is a highly toxic substance.
- Young children under the age of six years are especially at risk to the effects of lead because of their rapidly developing brains and central nervous systems.
- Possible complications of lead exposure include learning problems and slowed body growth. Early identification and treatment of lead poisoning reduces the risk that children will suffer permanent damage.
- There are many sources from which children are exposed to lead, including peeling paint on cribs or walls, dust containing lead, contaminated bare soil or drinking water in lead pipes, ceramics painted with lead paint and home remedies containing lead.
- A simple blood test is used to determine the diagnosis of elevated lead levels.
- Symptoms of lead poisoning can include irritability, aggressive behavior, low appetite and energy, difficulty sleeping, headaches, loss of previous developmental skills in young children, anemia and constipation. Abdominal pain and cramping is usually the first sign of a high, toxic dose of lead poison. Very high levels of poisoning may cause vomiting, a staggering gait, muscle weakness, seizures or coma. See a doctor immediately if any of these symptoms exist.



Peeling wooden cribs that have been painted can cause high lead levels in children.



High lead levels can be diagnosed with a simple blood test.



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TREATMENT:

- It is very important for children with lead poisoning to eat frequently and to keep food in their stomachs as this slows absorption of the lead.
- Medicines are available to help lower very high lead levels in children. This medicine must be administered by a doctor who can monitor the child closely.

PREVENTION:

- Most lead comes from dust particles.
- Do not burn gasoline for fuel or heat.
- Paint over old walls with iron free paint.
- Children who have low iron will eat anything or put things in their mouths in an attempt to get iron; so all toys need to be clean and free of dust.
- Cribs should not be painted as children can ingest the paint that is chipped off.
- Frequently wash a child's hands. This is especially important before meals.



Children who have diets high in iron absorb lead more slowly.



- Make sure that children with or who are at risk for elevated lead levels have an adequate intake of iron to slow the absorption of lead. Children who are exposed to lead should receive formula with iron or on vitamin drops with iron.
- The amount of lead in a child's body can also be reduced if the child's diet includes plenty of foods rich in iron, calcium and zinc. Examples of foods rich in iron include eggs, raisins, greens, beans, peas and other legumes. Dairy products such as milk, cheese and yogurt are recommended for their high calcium content. Lean red meat and oysters are examples of foods that contain zinc.

It is important that diaper creams and powders be free of lead.