



A CUP OF HEALTH WITH CDC

Get the Lead Out

Childhood Lead Poisoning Associated with Lead Dust Contamination of Family Vehicles and Child Safety Seats — Maine, 2008

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[Announcer] This podcast is presented by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. CDC — safer, healthier people.

[Dr. Gaynes] Welcome to *A Cup of Health with CDC*, a weekly feature of the MMWR, the Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report. I'm your host, Dr. Robert Gaynes.

Since the federal ban on lead in gasoline and paint, lead poisoning among children in the U.S. has decreased substantially, but there are still sources of exposure that place people at risk. A recent CDC study identified a cluster of cases in Maine caused by parents getting lead dust on their clothes, shoes, or vehicles at a worksite and carrying it home, where their children were then exposed.

Tina Bernier is the Environmental Specialist for the Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention. She's joining us by phone today to discuss the dangers of take home lead exposure. Welcome to the show, Tina.

[Ms. Bernier] Thank you.

[Dr. Gaynes] Tina, when did the federal government pass the ban on lead in paint and gasoline?

[Ms. Bernier] Well, the 70s was the period of time where people became very aware that it was important to reduce the amount of lead we exposed ourselves to.

[Dr. Gaynes] So how big of an impact did the ban have on lead exposure in children?

[Ms. Bernier] It was very significant. We saw an average blood lead level of 15 in children in the nation back in the 70s, and today, we consider even 10 to be a level of concern. The average blood lead level has actually dropped to two or less with this change in the content of lead in gas and in paint, though we still have a lot of leaded paint remaining in the old houses that we have.

[Dr. Gaynes] What occupations have an increased level of lead exposure?

[Ms. Bernier] The particular cases that we saw, it was related to paint removal in old houses and to lead in metals – recycling. Additionally, anything that you take paint off of or tear down that's old could have lead paint associated with it. And we also see other jobs in homes, doing renovation, such as soldering pipes or just re-working – remodeling – that can expose folks to lead.

[Dr. Gaynes] So how do children or other family members become exposed to lead brought home from a worksite?

[Ms. Bernier] Well, typically, what happens is a worker gets dust on their clothing. They then get into their car, go home. Either they handle the child before they have a chance to shower or they might sit down at the couch and have a conversation and they leave a little bit of this residual lead behind every step of the way. Children are very likely to put things in their mouth at the ages of one and two, you know, have their hands on the floor, hands on the couch, then put their hands in their mouth and that transfers lead into the child's body.

[Dr. Gaynes] Tina, what are the symptoms of lead exposure or lead poisoning?

[Ms. Bernier] Well, typically we don't see any symptoms; we don't see any indicator that the child is ill at the time that they are exposed. What tends to happen is that that impact, because it's to the brain and the nervous system, shows up later on as a child gets older and is trying to learn, so we see a level of learning disabilities, irritability, inability to focus, things along that line that show up generally later on. The only way to really tell if a child's been exposed is just to have a blood lead test. And as I said earlier, there's really no safe exposure level, so we're looking for the lowest level possible for children to have in their systems.

[Dr. Gaynes] What precautions can people take to avoid exposing their family to lead brought home from the worksite?

[Ms. Bernier] Well, the first thought that we have is that changing your clothes before you get into your vehicle is very important. As noted in that article, what we saw was that the actual exposure point for the kids wasn't at home, wasn't all the way home, it was in the vehicle where the parent had gone first, after doing work on a site. And we saw that lead coming from actually off of the children's car seats, and we're not sure how it got deposited there, but it was there that we saw very high levels of lead. So our thought is that you really need to change, if you can, shower, bag up your clothes, bag up your tools and avoid having any lead dust contamination come into the car.

[Dr. Gaynes] Where can people get more information about the dangers of take-home lead exposure?

[Ms. Bernier] Well, my state website is maine.gov and if you look up "Take Home Lead" in the search box, you can find a lot more information about that.

[Dr. Gaynes] Thanks, Tina. I've been talking today with CDC's Tina Bernier about the dangers of take-home lead exposure.

Remember, if you work in an occupation where you are potentially exposed to lead, take precautions, such as wearing personal protective equipment and change or clean your clothes and vehicle before returning home.

Until next time, be well. This is Dr. Robert Gaynes for *A Cup of Health with CDC*.

[Announcer] For the most accurate health information, visit www.cdc.gov or call 1-800-CDC-INFO, 24/7.