

# Is Your Child Safe from Lead Poisoning?

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

[Susan Laird] Welcome to this podcast about testing children for lead poisoning. I'm your host, Susan Laird. With us today is Dr. Mary Jean Brown, chief of CDC's Lead Poisoning Prevention Program. In recognition of National Lead Poisoning Prevention Week, she's here to discuss the importance of testing children for lead poisoning. Welcome to the show, Dr. Brown.

[Dr. Brown] Thank you.

[Susan Laird] Dr. Brown, what is lead poisoning and why should parents and caregivers be concerned about it?

[Dr. Brown] Childhood lead poisoning is a major, preventable environmental health problem. About a quarter of a million of U.S. children one to five years old have blood lead levels that exceed the level at which CDC recommends initiating follow-up. Evidence shows that lead poisoning can cause permanent learning disabilities and behavioral problems. At very high levels, lead poisoning can cause seizures, coma, and even death. Lead poisoning often occurs with no obvious symptoms. This is why it's so important to test children early. Early testing can help prevent damage caused by exposure to lead because it can alert parents to the existence of a lead exposure problem. For example, if testing shows a child's blood has an elevated level of lead, then steps can be taken to protect the child from further exposure.

[Susan Laird] How are children exposed to lead and how does lead get into their bodies?

[Dr. Brown] The most common source of exposures are lead-based paint and dust and soil that are contaminated with lead paint. This contamination often is in the form of paint chips or paint dust. Children typically ingest lead through common hand-to-mouth activities, such as when they drop toys on floors contaminated with lead dust and then put the toys in their mouths. They also could eat lead-contaminated soil when they are playing outside. Toys, jewelry, and ceramic pots painted with lead-based paint are other less common sources of lead. Other sources to consider are imported cosmetics, candies from Mexico, and some traditional home remedies used by East Indian, Indian, Middle Eastern, West Asian, and Hispanic cultures. Children can also be exposed to lead during home renovations, repairs, and painting that create lead-contaminated dust.

[Susan Laird] Who is at most risk for lead poisoning and who should be tested for lead?

[Dr. Brown] CDC recommends that children who live in older housing, that is, housing built before 1978, housing being renovated, or those who may be exposed to other sources of lead, be tested at the ages of one and two years old, or at three to six years of age if they have not previously been tested. Although lead in residential paint was banned in 1978, we especially recommend testing children living in homes built before 1950 because there was a higher concentration of lead in the paint then. Lead-based paint becomes a hazard when the paint begins to deteriorate and peel or undergoes a renovation that creates lead-contaminated dust. About 24

million housing units in the United States have deteriorated leaded paint and elevated levels of lead-contaminated house dust.

[Susan Laird] Where can children get a lead test?

[Dr. Brown] Parents can contact their primary health care provider or local health department to schedule a lead test.

[Susan Laird] What can parents do to prevent lead poisoning?

[Dr. Brown] Parents should make sure children don't have access to peeling paint or chewable surfaces painted with lead-based paint. Parents should also regularly clean surfaces that accumulate dust. For example, wet-mopping floors and wiping down window sills that children have easy access to. Parents can also take precautions during home renovations and children should never be present during renovation activities in older housing.

[Susan Laird] Dr. Brown, if a parent suspects that their child may have lead poisoning, what should they do?

[Dr. Brown] They should immediately ask their doctor to test their child for lead poisoning.

[Susan Laird] What if a parent is told that their child has lead poisoning?

[Dr. Brown] If a test confirms that a child has an elevated blood lead level, which is ten micrograms per deciliter or higher, then the state or local health department should be contacted to conduct a home inspection and identify possible lead hazards. If lead hazards are identified, the health department will develop a case-management plan to determine the best strategies for removing the lead hazards from the home and other areas that the child is around often.

[Susan Laird] Where can our listeners get more information about lead and how to prevent lead poisoning?

[Dr. Brown] For more information, listeners can visit CDC's web site at [www.cdc.gov/lead](http://www.cdc.gov/lead) or call the National Lead Information Center at 1-800-424-LEAD, that's 1-800-424-5323.

[Susan Laird] Thank you, Dr. Brown, for sharing this important information about getting children tested for lead poisoning.

[Dr. Brown] It's been my pleasure to be here this morning.

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