



Get the Lead Out

Recalls involving children's toys and lead have been in the news throughout 2007 leaving many parents and caregivers asking what are the dangers and how do we protect our children?

Lead is what is known as a neurotoxic agent and even in small amounts can harm the developing brain and nervous system of young children resulting in learning problems. High levels of lead can also cause anemia, hearing problems and slowed growth. It is estimated that lead poisoning affects about 5% of children in Canada and the U.S.

Lead poisoning occurs when you absorb too much lead by breathing or swallowing a substance with lead in it such as food, dust, paint or water. It is caused by months or years of exposure to lead and it can also happen quickly with exposure to high concentrations.

Over the past 30 year, largely owing to the phasing out of leaded gasoline and paint, lead exposure has dropped dramatically. In addition, lead-soldered food cans have been eliminated. However, there are still a number of consumer products available globally where children are exposed to lead. Young children are at greater risk of exposure because they tend to put objects in their mouth. In addition, older homes may have leaded paint or plumbing systems containing lead both of which can cause elevated lead levels.

Dr. Ran Goldman is the Division Head and Medical Director of the Division of Pediatric Emergency Medicine at BC Children's and he has both treated and diagnosed children with lead poisoning. Dr. Goldman feels that, "lead poisoning is entirely preventable. The key is stopping children from coming into contact with lead. The best approach is prevention." Dr. Goldman suggests that if your child has symptoms of lead poisoning or you fear has ingested large quantities of lead-have them tested by a physician." Dr. Goldman identifies the symptoms of lead poisoning as chronic abdominal pain, chronic fatigue, lack of energy and behavioral problems including irritability and learning difficulties and advises parents to be on the lookout for these if they suspect their child may have come into contact with lead.



Toys and products produced in other countries may contain lead or be covered with paint which has lead. Lead is often used to make children's jewellery and children may suck or chew on these items. Be aware of purchasing second hand toys or jewelry at garage sales or flea markets. It may be hard to know where these toys came from, what age of child they were intended for and what they contain. In addition, it may be impossible to know if that item has been recalled. If you have young children or take care of young ones familiarize yourself with credible resources that provide up to date recall listings of toys and products. Make sure to

check these periodically to ensure that a toy or product your child comes into contact frequently has not been recalled.

Dr. Goldman emphasizes that “ the goal in protecting children from lead poisoning is to prevent exposure before they are harmed. Lead hazards in a child’s environment needs to be identified, controlled or removed safely.”

Is Your Home Safe From Lead?

One out of four Canadian dwellings was built prior to 1960. While not all older homes pose lead hazards, some do, and there are some precautionary measures that families can take to protect their family from lead in the water, soil or paint.

- Never let young children spend time in a room where there is peeling paint. Some children like to put paint chips in their mouth and even the dust coming into contact with leaded paint can be unsafe.
- Renovate safely-Take special care of dust control during renovations. Keep children out of renovated spaces until the work is finished and well cleaned

Children who are the highest risk for lead poisoning include those who:

- Live in older homes (especially homes built before 1950 when lead based paint was commonly used)
- Reside in inner cities
- Have been adopted or recently immigrated from countries where lead poisoning is common, such as China
- Are between the ages of 1 and 5 years
- Children whose drinking water flows through lead soldered pipes
- Children who wear jewellery containing lead

For More Information:

For up to date recalls: Health Canada, Consumer Product Safety
www.hc-sc.gc.ca/cps-spc/advisories-avis/child-enfant

BC Health Guide: (type “lead” into search bar)
<http://www.bchealthguide.org/kbaltindex.asp>

Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (type “lead” into search bar)
www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca

Lead recalls from Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
www.cdc.gov/nceh/lead/Recalls/default.htm

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Safe Start, BC Children’s Hospital
www.bcchildrens.ca/safestart