

Lead

How You Can be Exposed

The primary way that lead enters the environment is from human activity. For example, the historical use of lead in gasoline, paints, pipes, batteries, cosmetics and other products.

- **Lead products** – as household products that contain lead deteriorate, chip, or peel, small particles can get into the air and be ingested. Certain traditional or folk remedies may contain lead as well.
- **Food** – lead can contaminate food during production, processing, packaging or storage.
- **Water** – lead can leach into water from plumbing elements like water service lines, pipes, faucets, and solder. This is more likely to be true of homes built before 1986.
- **Workplace exposure** – workers in industries that use lead can be exposed by ingesting or inhaling small particles of the metal.

Health Effects

Lead exposure is particularly concerning for children. Even small doses can have a big impact. Lead exposure has been associated with brain damage, developmental issues, hearing and speech problems, and trouble paying attention or performing well in school. If you suspect that your child has been exposed to lead, a blood test is the best way to determine how much lead is in their body.

Lead can cause health issues for adults as well, including increased risk of high blood pressure, heart problems and damage to the kidneys.

How to Limit Exposure

If you live in an older home, get it tested by a certified lead inspector to understand if you are being exposed to lead from paint, trim, windows, or walls. Do not sand, scrape, or disturb old paint without proper safety precautions, as this could allow lead paint to get into the air. If you are concerned about lead plumbing, contact your water utility or a licensed plumber for evaluation. If you do find that there is lead in your water, be sure to use a filter certified to remove the metal (see additional resources below for more information).

Some hobbies may involve risk for lead exposure, such as jewelry making, welding, or ceramics. If you do these hobbies, be sure to change clothes before coming home to avoid bringing small lead particles home with you and shower after doing the activity. If you live in an area with elevated lead in the soil, make sure to remove shoes when entering the home, wet mop, and wipe down surfaces frequently to avoid lead exposure from dust.

Additional Resources

The EPA has created a [step-by-step guide](#) to find out if your home gets water from a service line that has lead pipes

RTI International created a [guide](#) to water filters including which filters are most effective at removing lead in household water sources.

Sources

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