

Levels of lead once thought harmless are now known to sometimes cause serious health problems.



Health damage can occur from lead exposure below the limits regulated by OSHA:

- Damage can be permanent.
- Damage can be occurring even if you have no symptoms.
- Damage (effects) may not show up until many years later.
- Damage could be to your family if you carry lead dust into your car or home.

What health damage can even low levels of lead cause?

Studies in recent years show that low levels of lead in adults can:

- Increase blood pressure-may increase your chances of having a heart attack or stroke
- Decrease brain function-making it more difficult to think, learn, and remember
- Harm the physical and mental development of your baby before it is born
- Increase chances of having a miscarriage
- Damage almost any part of your body, including your kidneys, blood, brain, and nerves.

What level of lead in your blood is harmful from a medical point of view?

- Scientists and doctors are now recommending that all adults keep their blood lead exposure below 10 micrograms per deciliter ($\mu\text{g}/\text{dL}$).
- Pregnant women, those planning to get pregnant, or women who are breastfeeding should not have a blood lead level above 5 $\mu\text{g}/\text{dL}$.

If you work with lead you need to:

- Find out how much lead is in your blood
- Talk to your doctor about lead and your health
- Take steps to protect your health

What should I tell my doctor?

Your doctor or medical provider needs to know if you work with lead. Your doctor can order a blood lead level test if you need one. Tell the doctor:

- What you do at work.
- How long you have been at your job.
- If you have had to be moved to a different job or be off work because your lead level was high.
- If you think working with lead is making you sick.
- If you have any hobbies or part-time jobs that could expose you to lead.
- If you had any lead jobs or hobbies in the past.
- If you have ever had a blood lead test and what the result (number) was if you know.
- Women should also tell their doctor if they are pregnant or thinking about becoming pregnant.

You may have a medical condition that makes you more sensitive to the harmful effects of lead. Ask the doctor if you have any medical conditions that may make you more sensitive to the effects of lead, such as:

- High blood pressure
- Kidney disease
- Brain or nerve disease
- Other health problems

What can I do to protect myself and my family?

Get a blood lead test every 6-12 months, either through work or through your private medical provider.

- How often you should get tested may vary depending on the type of job you do, hobbies, and your health. If more lead is involved in that job process, more exposure = get tested more often.
- Depending on your blood lead level, you may need to get repeat tests more often.

Ask your doctor if you need any follow-up medical tests not done routinely by your employer to see if lead is affecting your health or the health of your family, such as:

- Blood pressure check or other heart function tests
- Kidney function tests
- Cognitive evaluation (how you think, process information, make decisions)
- Lead tests for family members
- Other tests

Make sure you don't accidentally swallow lead.

- Wash your hands and face with soap and water before eating or drinking and before leaving work.
- Do not eat, drink, or smoke in the work area.
- Keep your work area clean. Best: wet clean (soapy water) methods to wipe down surfaces, and mop or HEPA vacuum the shop floor daily.
- Take a shower and wash your hair (including facial hair) at work before you go home if possible.
- Change into clean clothes and shoes at work, and keep dirty work clothes and shoes away from clean street clothes.
- If you can't shower and change at work before going home, you can still:
 - Wash your face, hands and arms with soap and water before you leave.
 - Change your work shoes and store them in a plastic bag or plastic tote in your trunk before getting into your car or truck.
 - Ask if you can wear a washable coverall over your work clothes, and leave it at work or remove it and store it with your work shoes in your trunk to keep from contaminating your car or truck. If not, change shirts before you get in your vehicle and put your dirty shirt with your work shoes in the trunk.
 - Shower as soon as you get home.
 - Wash your work clothes separate from the rest of the family's laundry.

Do what you can to lower the amount of lead you breathe in.

- If you have local exhaust ventilation, turn it on and position it correctly while you work with lead.
- Talk to your employer about wearing a respirator while you work with lead. If you already wear a respirator, ask whether there is another type of respirator that will protect you better. Talk to your safety officer to ask if your employer will pay to have a doctor evaluate whether you can wear one safely. A fit-test is required to make sure that a respirator fits you well.

Work with your employer to make the work place safer.

- If your blood lead test is elevated or you have concerns about lead exposure at work, talk to your safety officer and ask if there are additional steps that your employer can take to reduce the amount of lead in your work area, even if the exposure is less than the amounts currently regulated by OSHA.
- There are often ways to change your work process that will reduce the amount of lead in the air or on surfaces. Some are easy, and some are more complex.
- Companies can ask for help to determine the risks and possible solutions for making the workplace safer. Contact the IDPH ABLES program for more information.