

Lead Safe Toys for North Carolina Children

Prepared by the N.C. Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Program
Division of Environmental Health, N.C. DENR

Lead exposure in children can cause reduced IQ, impaired growth and learning disabilities. Lead poisoning causes permanent damage. Children under the age of 6 and pregnant women are most at risk.



photo: Anissa Thompson

How does lead get in toys?

Lead may be found in the paint on toys. It can also be found in the plastic. When the plastic is exposed to sunlight, air and detergents, the lead and plastics can break down and form a toxic dust. Children may be exposed to lead from toys if they put them in their mouths or transfer lead dust from a toy to their bodies by putting their hands to their mouths.

How do you know if your child's toys could be contaminated?

Check Consumer Product Safety Commission recalls, <http://www.cpsc.gov>. You can also send a toy to an accredited laboratory; although, the toy will not likely be returned to you because the testing is destructive. It is important not to rely on home test kits as they have not proven to be accurate in many cases.

How do you dispose of contaminated toys?

Remove the toy from your child's hands. Follow instructions from the CPSC for recalled toys – most often you will need to return the toy to the manufacturer. Clean other toys that were near the recalled toy to remove lead dust.

What are some tips for buying lead safe toys?

Check for recalled toys with the CPSC before you shop, and check to see if toy manufacturers are participating in voluntary lead testing. Be cautious about where the toy was made. Throw away toys with chipped paint or deteriorating plastic. Avoid low-cost metal toy jewelry such as those purchased from vending machines.



It can be hard to detect lead poisoning because symptoms are not always present. Common symptoms include:

- headache
- stomachache
- vomiting
- diarrhea
- muscle weakness
- irritability
- tiredness
- aggressiveness
- hyperactivity
- loss of appetite

Lead is invisible to the naked eye and has no smell. Washing children's hands often, especially before they eat and after playing outside, can prevent exposure.

Where else might my child be exposed to lead?

The most common source of lead is from lead-based paint, which was used before 1978 and can chip or form a toxic dust that children ingest. Other sources of lead include contaminated soil, vinyl mini-blinds, imported candy, lead-glazed pottery, fishing tackle, and home-remedies such as azarcan and greta. Lead can also accumulate in water pipes with lead-based solder.

Can diet help reduce lead poisoning?

Yes. A diet rich in iron and calcium can help prevent lead from being absorbed by a child. A full stomach also helps the body absorb less lead. Do not drink, cook or make baby formula with water from the hot-water tap. Remember to run cold water for 15 to 30 seconds before you use it in order to flush lead from pipes.



photo: Mark Forman

How do you know if your child is safe?

Ask your doctor to conduct a simple blood test – it is the only sure way to know. There is no safe level of lead in a child.

N.C. Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Program
Call the Lead Hotline with questions at
1-888-774-0071 (toll free).

Helpful Web Sites:

- N.C. Children's Environmental Health Branch: http://www.deh.enr.state.nc.us/ehs/Children_Health/Lead/lead.html
- Check for recalled toys by the Consumer Product Safety Commission: www.cpsc.gov
- National Center for Healthy Housing: www.centerforhealthyhousing.org/html/lead_in_toys1.htm