

Without lead, your child is safe!

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How safe is my child? This is a typical question of concerned parents about their child's blood lead level and what it means.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) there is no safe blood lead level for children. Recently, CDC lowered the blood-lead reference value from 5 to 3.5 micrograms per deciliter (mcg/dL). This means that a child with a blood lead result greater than or equal to 3.5 mcg/dL has a lead level higher than most children tested.

Lead poisoning can damage a child's brain and the nervous system and lead to behavioral problems, anemia, hearing loss, hyperactivity, seizures, developmental delays, and in extreme cases death.

When lead is found in a child's system it is important to remove it as quickly as possible to prevent long term health impacts from occurring. What can be done to get the lead out? First, it is important to identify and remove the source of lead from the child's environment. Most children in Iowa are lead poisoned from contact with deteriorated lead-based paint, lead in dust, and lead-contaminated soil.

Repairing lead hazards is not always an option for low-income families. However, there are inexpensive ways to reduce or eliminate sources of lead in the home. One of them is to block or cover the lead-based paint hazards with other objects, like furniture or non-hazardous materials (non-lead paint). The idea is to prevent the child from coming into contact with lead paint hazards, like paint chips, dust, and soil that can be ingested.

The Iowa Department of Public Health (IDPH) has identified other sources of lead that have poisoned children. For instance, lead glazed pottery or porcelain, traditional home remedies that contain lead such as zircon and Greta, and spices and candies from Mexico and Southeast Asia. In cases like this, IDPH recommends families avoid using these and other products not approved for use by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA).

Additionally, IDPH recommends the following practices:

- Clean the house more regularly, especially the areas where the child plays, eats and sleeps. Also, clean toys (stuffed animals) and other items the child plays with.
- Wash child's hands with soap and water after play, before eating, and at bedtime.
- Provide a well-balanced diet rich in iron and calcium such as beans, green leafy vegetables, fruits, cereals and milk products. Proper nutrition helps a child's body eliminate lead faster.

Children 6-12 months in age become lead poisoned quickly and easily from exploring their environment. As their activity increases between 18-36 months in age so can their blood lead level. It is important to get children tested early and often to determine their blood lead level and actions needed to help them get the lead out of their bodies.

Contact your child's doctor to get your child tested or contact the Iowa Department of Public Health at (515) 281- 3225 or at 800-972-2026 for more information.