

Community Legal Aid

A non-profit law firm serving the legal needs of low-income individuals and families in central northeast Ohio



www.communitylegalaid.org

I want to learn about lead and if my family is in danger.

The information below will help you understand what lead is and what steps you can take to protect yourself and your family.

What is lead?

Lead is a metal. It lives naturally in our planet's ground, and companies mine it and use it to make things.

It's used in a lot of different things -- from jewelry, to toys, to batteries, to cookware, dishes, glasses.

It can also be found in your home -- in pipes or even in paint on your walls.

Lead can also be in the dirt around your home, especially if you live near busy highways, certain types of factories, or a neighborhood with older homes.

Even though it's a natural element, lead is dangerous to people, especially to kids. No level of lead is safe. And any time we eat or drink anything that has touched lead, it gets into our bodies. If we get too much of it, this is called "lead poisoning."

How can lead affect my kids?

Because lead can affect brain development, it's especially dangerous to kids whose brains are still in young stages of development. And worst of all, the damage it causes can be permanent.

Even small levels of lead can make children inattentive, hyperactive, or irritable. Higher lead levels in children can cause problems with learning and reading, their growth, and hearing loss.

But some kids may not show signs at all, until their levels have gotten dangerously high.

Lead is also dangerous to women who are pregnant. It's been linked to premature birth, low birth weights, and even miscarriage.

How do I know if my child has been poisoned by lead?

Because some children may not show symptoms, the best way to check your child is by testing for lead levels in their blood. This is usually a quick and easy finger prick and is over in seconds. It may take a few days to get the results back.

If you have taken your child to regular well checks since they were born, it's possible your child already has had a lead test. A lot of doctors do this as part of routine check-ups. It's also something the state requires if your child is on Medicaid.

If you're not sure if your child has already been tested, call your pediatrician's office to find out.

If your child hasn't been tested, there are a couple places you can reach out to:

- A local doctor's or pediatrician's office or health clinic
- Your local health department
- Any nearby children's hospital

Tell them you'd like to have your child tested for lead and ask where you can do that. Your city or county may even have programs where they do lead testing for free.

How can I find out if there is lead in my home?

Another important step to take is to have your home tested for lead. If your home was built before 1978, you are at a higher risk for having lead in it -- in paint, pipes and water, or even the soil around your house.

To find out if your home has lead, contact your local health department. Many health

departments have lead testing kits and can either give you one or have someone come out to your home to test for you. Even if they don't have these kits available, they should be able to help point you in the right direction.

You can also purchase testing kits at most home improvement stores and perform the test yourself by following the instructions included in the kit.

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