



## Lead Poisoning

### What is lead poisoning?

Lead is a heavy metal found in many common items such as: paints, pottery, batteries and traditional remedies. Although it has many uses, lead is also a poison. Children under the age of six are at the highest risk for poisoning due to their size and exposure to lead.

### What are the health effects of lead poisoning?

Children can absorb up to 50% of the lead they take into their bodies and be easily poisoned. A child's rapidly developing brain, central nervous system and entire body can be damaged by lead. Children ages one to three are at very high risk for lead poisoning because they crawl on floors, put things in their mouths and can swallow lead dust. The effects of childhood lead poisoning often last a lifetime.

Lead poisoning can cause:

- Reduction of child's ability to learn.
- Poor muscle and bone growth.
- Behavior problems.
- Hearing, speech and language problems.
- Coordination problems.

### How are children exposed to lead?

**Lead paint or soil:** The major source of exposure for children is from lead dust created by deteriorated lead-based paint. Homes built before 1978 may contain lead based paint. Exterior lead paint may contaminate the soil around the house where children often play.

**Food and water:** Traditional remedies, cosmetics and food items such as Chapulines (grasshoppers) can also contain high levels of lead. Some dishes, ceramic ware or pottery may contain lead and when food is cooked in or eaten out of these items, lead can leach (leak) into the food. Old lead pipes and lead solder may contaminate drinking water.

**Toys:** Children's toys or jewelry may be contaminated with lead. Parents should check the Consumer Product Safety Commission website ([www.cpsc.gov](http://www.cpsc.gov)) for a complete list of recalled items.

**Occupational exposure and hobbies:** Certain occupations or hobbies can expose people to lead. Some occupations include: carpenters, painters, steel welders and cutters, plumbers, pipe fitters, and car mechanics.

### How is lead poisoning treated?

All children should be tested for lead in their blood. The test is a finger stick and should be done when the child is one year old and again at two years old, or at least once before the age of six. The test can be done at the Guilford County Department of Public Health, 1100 E. Wendover Avenue in Greensboro or 501 E. Green Drive in High Point. Lab hours are 9:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m., and 1:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m. The test is FREE and no appointment is necessary. Children may also be tested for lead at their private health care provider's office.

For more information, call the Guilford County Department of Health and Human Services, Public Health Division at (336) 641-3771.