

What Family Child Care Providers Can Do About Lead

You're probably familiar with the dangers of childhood lead poisoning. You may even have attended a few trainings on the topic. But did you realize that as a family child care provider you play a vital role in keeping children safe from lead hazards? The nation's Healthy People 2010 strategy, involving over 400 national organizations and coordinated by the Department of Health and Human Services and other federal agencies, is working to eliminate lead poisoning by the end of the decade and needs your help.

Far fewer children get lead poisoning today, thanks to bans on lead paint and gasoline, public education and lead-safe repair practices. But we have a long way to go before we can declare victory over lead poisoning as it still causes serious health problems with long-lasting developmental effects.

The U.S. Centers on Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) standards for levels of lead in the blood define results at or above 10 micrograms/deciliters as dangerous for children. According to the CDC, the percentage of children 1-5 years old with more than 10 micrograms of lead per deciliter of blood dropped by half (to 2.2 percent) from 1999-2000. (See http://www.cdc.gov/exposurereport/2nd/lead_factsheet.htm.)

Research now shows that *any* level of lead can affect a child's health, including lowered I.Q., hearing problems, slowed growth and behavior and learning problems.

Children get lead poisoning when they swallow or breathe in lead dust or eat paint chips, soil, food or water that contains lead. Parents whose occupations or hobbies involve lead products bring dust home on their clothes, car and seats. Contrary to common belief, lead risks can occur in both urban and rural communities.

The United States banned lead in residential paint in 1978. Any house built before 1978 could still have lead-based paint, which must be kept in good condition. Deteriorated lead-based paint and lead dust – not intact paint – pose a danger.

Completely eliminating lead-based paint is difficult and expensive. However, you can control the dangers of lead-based paint by following these steps. (You should hire a safety-trained lead contractor to do this work. But if you opt to do it yourself, you should always follow lead-safe work practices):

Repair or replace abrasion, “chewable” or impact surfaces like painted doors, windows and trim to stop dust creation (the constant open-and-closing friction creates large amounts of paint dust).

- Repair and repaint lead-painted surfaces such as walls, radiators, doors, stairways, ceilings and trim.
- Fix the moisture or structural problems that initially caused the paint to deteriorate.

Protecting your home against the dangers of lead begins with keeping lead-based paint in good repair – but does not end there. Lead still appears in many common household products made overseas. In the past 10 years, for example, many were recalled for lead by the US. Consumer Products Safety Commission, including some vinyl mini-blinds, vending-machine jewelry, crayons and sidewalk chalk and painted buttons on children's apparel. Glazed pottery, cans with lead solder, and many imported folk medicines and foods can also contain lead.

Another potential lead hazard is the water systems in many older cities that still have lead pipes or contain lead-based solder. Water left standing in these pipes can contain lead. Flush water pipes every six hours by running cold water for a minimum of three minutes before using water for drinking or cooking. And do not use hot tap water for making formula.

Lead-safe yards are also important to children’s health. Even though lead was banned from gasoline in the 1980s, the lead from car and truck emissions before the ban remains in soil in high traffic areas and will never go away. For this reason, yards should never have exposed, bare soil. Cover the yard with thick grass or sod, or a six-inch layer of mulch or woodchips.

A family child care home affects the lives of many children, those who live there and those who receive care there. Potential lead hazards can be found in child care provider homes just as easily as in private homes. Armed with the right information, you can do something about that. By following lead-safe practices, you can protect the children in your care and increase parents’ lead awareness, all while playing a vital role in the nation’s strategy to end lead poisoning by 2010.

Family Child Care Lead-Safety Checklist: Is Your Home Safe?

This checklist will help providers think carefully about their home environment, program and daily routine. Examine any statements you checked as “no” to see if you can correct them with small adjustments. Consult your local child care resource and referral organization (find yours at www.childcareaware.org) about your checklist results, especially if you don’t know how to fix the problems.

	YES	NO	If “no,” do you know what to do to fix it?
Learning about and testing for lead			
I have talked with my local child care resource and referral agency about local lead-safety training resources.			
If I bought or rented a pre-1978 home after Sept. 1996, I received a copy of the EPA pamphlet, <i>Protect Your Family from Lead in Your Home</i> .			
My home was built before 1978 and I have had it tested for lead by a certified inspector or lead risk assessor.			
I know I need lead repairs for my pre-1978 home. I have contacted my local health department, housing department or office of environmental affairs to find contractors trained in lead safety.			
I had a contractor trained in lead safety make needed repairs on my pre-1978 home.			
I follow HUD- and EPA-recommended repair, maintenance and cleaning practices to minimize lead dust.			
Lead-safe practices indoors			
I have changed my house cleaning routine to include cleaning for lead dust (see Resources for instructions).			
I check monthly for holes, peeling paint, paint chips or dust on my floors, walls, windows, baseboards, ceiling and trim.			
I have replaced older vinyl mini-blinds with lead-free blinds.			

	YES	NO	If "no," do you know what to do to fix it?
I flush water pipes every six hours by running cold water for a minimum of three minutes before using water for drinking or cooking.			
I do not use hot tap water for making formula.			
I teach good hand-washing techniques.			
I know where my toys, educational materials, children's jewelry and dinnerware were manufactured and they don't contain lead.			
I have no lead-containing products on the Consumer Products Safety Commission (CPSC) recall lists in my home (see Resources section).			
I know that yard sales sometimes sell CPSC-banned products, I watch for that when I buy second-hand toys and materials.			
Lead-safe practices outdoors			
I check monthly for flaking or peeling paint on any exterior surface, including buildings, porches, fences and playground equipment.			
I keep all painted surfaces on outdoor buildings and playground equipment in good repair.			
I have enclosed crawl spaces under painted porches with lattice or fencing to keep children from getting underneath.			
I have covered any bare soil in my yard with dense grass or a six-inch layer of woodchips or mulch.			
I check monthly to see that my outdoor play space, including neighborhood playground, is free of paint chips and bare soil, as well as feces, broken glass or trash.			
Developing a lead-safe routine			
I incorporate lead-safety messages into my program's curriculum.			
I show children what I do to keep my home lead safe.			
Parent education			
I include lead-safety lessons in my parent communications.			
I encourage parents to have children tested for lead at 12 and 24 months (as required by law).			
I show parents what I do to keep my home lead safe.			

Resources

For more on the goals of Healthy People 2010, go to www.healthypeople.gov. For strategies specific to eliminating lead poisoning, go to <http://www.healthypeople.gov/document/html/objectives/08-11.htm>.

The Consumer Products Safety Commission publishes recall lists for products containing lead and having other hazards, www.cpsc.org.

Protect Your Family From Lead in Your Home, from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, www.epa.gov/opptintr/lead/leadpdf.pdf.

Lead in Water: Questions and Answers, from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Branch, <http://www.cdc.gov/nceh/lead/spotlights/leadinwater.htm>.

Lead Paint Safety: A Field Guide for Painting, Home Maintenance, and Renovation Work, from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Office of Healthy Housing and Lead Hazard Control, <http://www.hud.gov/offices/lead/training/LBPguide.pdf>.

Help Yourself to a Healthy Home: Protect Your Children's Health, from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Office of Healthy Housing and Lead Hazard Control, <http://www.hud.gov/offices/lead/healthyhomes/healthyhomebook.pdf>.

The Lead Listing (www.leadlisting.org) provides lists of trained contractors, inspectors and risk assessors in your state.

For additional support resources on this topic see www.centerforhealthyhousing.org.

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