

Contaminants in Drinking Water: Lead

What is lead?

Lead is a metal that exists naturally in the environment. It was used in household products like paint, plumbing, batteries, and gasoline. Lead was removed from most products in the 1980s because it is toxic, but many older homes still contain lead.

How does lead affect people?

Lead is toxic, especially for young children and people who are pregnant. Even low levels of lead in the body can cause behavioral problems and hyperactivity, learning problems and lower IQ, slowed physical growth and development, hearing problems, and anemia.

How do people get exposed to lead?

Lead exposure is when lead gets into the body. The most common sources of exposure include lead contaminated drinking water, lead-based paints in older homes, contaminated soil, household dust, and imported goods. Ingesting or inhaling lead-containing particles is the primary way it enters the body.

Why was lead used in so many things?

Lead has several desirable properties. It is a softer metal that can be easily molded, and its ability to dampen noise makes it a useful material for many applications. For example, lead pipes were commonly used for plumbing, and lead-based paints were widely used in homes and household goods. Lead was banned from many products by the 1980s because of the bad health effects.

How can I prevent lead exposure?

To prevent lead exposure, it is important to:

- If you live in an older house (built before 1986), consider getting it tested for lead-based paint or lead pipes

- Regularly clean floors, windowsills, and other surfaces to reduce lead dust buildup
- Encourage thorough handwashing, especially before eating, and clean toys regularly to minimize lead ingestion
- Ensure a healthy diet rich in calcium, iron, and vitamin C, as these nutrients can help reduce how much lead the body takes in

Ways to get rid of lead sources

If lead sources are identified in your home, it's crucial to address them by:

- Hire professionals certified in lead removal to safely remove or seal off lead-based paint
- Consider replacing lead pipes with safer alternatives like copper or plastic
- Install and maintain a water filtration system that specifically removes lead to reduce its presence in drinking water
- Be cautious when purchasing products from overseas, as some may contain lead. Look for reputable brands and certifications

Remember, preventing lead exposure is crucial for protecting health, especially for vulnerable populations like children and pregnant people. By understanding the risks and taking necessary precautions, we can minimize the impact of lead on our well-being.

Where can I learn more about Lead?

For more information on lead exposure and technical assistance, contact GLITEC (Great Lakes Inter Tribal Epidemiology Center) at 715-588-3324 or consult your local health authorities or environmental protection agencies.

