

FS No. 058-1225

Lead-based Paint in Military Housing A Fact Sheet for Military Families

Many homes built before 1978 have lead-based paint. Lead from paint chips and dust can pose serious health hazards.

Lead-contaminated paint is not a hazard if it is contained under other coats of paint that are intact and undisturbed. It is only when lead-contaminated paint deteriorates, releasing chips and contaminating surface dust and soil, that it becomes a significant hazard. **The Army presumes that any paint in pre-1978 housing is lead-contaminated.** Accordingly, the Army's emphasis is on any deteriorating paint, as well as lead hazards in dust and soil as defined by federal or state programs.

Who is at Risk?

Children, especially under the age of 6, are particularly at risk of lead exposure because their mental and physical development occurs rapidly; they also tend to put their hands or other objects, which may be contaminated with lead-contaminated dust or soil, into their mouths. Children living in or spending significant time in homes or buildings built before 1978 may be at higher risk of exposure.

Adults may be exposed to lead by eating and drinking food or water containing lead or from dishes or glasses that contain lead. They may also breathe lead dust by spending time in areas where lead-based paint is deteriorating, and during renovation or repair work that disturbs painted surfaces in older homes and buildings. Working in a job or engaging in hobbies where lead is used, such as making stained glass or soldering, can increase exposure. Ingestion of certain folk remedies, which can contain lead, should be avoided. A pregnant woman's exposure to lead from these sources is of particular concern because it can result in exposure to her developing baby.

Children and Lead Exposure

Protecting children from exposure to lead is important to lifelong good health. **No safe blood lead level in children has been identified.** Even low levels of lead in blood have been shown to negatively affect IQ, ability to pay attention, and academic achievement. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends public health action be initiated when blood lead levels are above 3.5 micrograms per deciliter ($\mu\text{g}/\text{dL}$).

The adverse effects of lead exposure cannot be corrected once they occur, but there are treatments to remove lead from the body before it causes harm. The goal is to prevent lead exposure to children **before** they are harmed.

How are Children Exposed to Lead?

Lead in dust and soil particles in the environment are invisible to the naked eye and have no smell. Children may be exposed to lead from sources such as paint, certain hobbies, consumer products, and through pathways such as air, food, water, dust, and soil.

Lead-based paint and lead-contaminated dust are the most hazardous sources of lead for children. Leaded paints were banned for use in housing in 1978. All houses built before 1978 are likely to contain some lead-based paint. However, it is the **deterioration of this paint that causes a problem.**

What are the Health Effects of Lead in Children?

Lead can affect almost every organ and system in the body. Even low levels of lead in the blood of children can result in:

- Behavior and learning problems
- Lower IQ and hyperactivity
- Slowed growth

This fact sheet supersedes APHC Fact Sheet No. 66-015-0918, dated September 2018.

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Higher levels can result in hearing problems; anemia; and in rare cases, ingestion of lead can cause seizures, coma, and even death.

What Should You Do if You Think Your Child has been in Contact with Lead?

A blood lead test is the only definitive way to find out if your child has a high lead level. Many children with elevated blood lead levels may have no obvious symptoms.

If you think your child has been in contact with lead, schedule an appointment with your child's healthcare provider to have a lead exposure screening done to determine whether blood lead testing is needed.

Protect Your Family from Lead Exposure

Installations must inform all new tenants of Army family housing what is known about lead-based paint and lead hazards in their units. Protect Your Family from Lead in Your Home (linked below) must be provided as part of the information packet.

Installations and contractors must also provide information to the present tenants of housing units where renovations may disturb lead-based paint. Please see Renovate Right: Important Lead Hazard Information for Families, Child Care Providers, and Schools for more information in the resources section.

Reduce the Risk

- ✓ Be aware of the information on potential lead hazards that were given to you when moving in.
- ✓ Make sure your child does not have access to peeling paint or painted surfaces they could chew (i.e., windowsills or steps).
- ✓ Report peeling paint and water damage quickly to housing maintenance.
- ✓ Keep your home clean and dust-free, particularly around painted areas where friction can generate dust, such as doors, windows, and drawers. Wipe these areas frequently with a wet sponge or rag to remove paint chips or dust.
- ✓ Wash children's hands, bottles, pacifiers, and toys often.
- ✓ Ensure that your family members eat well-balanced meals. Children with diets rich in calcium and iron will absorb less lead.
- ✓ Take off shoes when entering the house to prevent bringing lead-contaminated soil in from outside.
- ✓ Wash your body and change your clothes and shoes before entering your home to protect family members. Lead from work and hobbies can come home on skin, hair, and clothes.
- ✓ Prevent children from playing in bare soil. If possible, provide them with sandboxes.

For additional information, contact your local medical treatment facility preventive medicine department or the Directorate of Public Works Environmental Division.

Resources:

Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry Toxic Substances Portal (Lead). <https://wwwn.cdc.gov/TSP/substances/ToxSubstance.aspx?toxid=22>

"Lead Information for Military Families," DCPH-A. <https://ph.health.mil/topics/workplacehealth/lh/Pages/Lead.aspx>

"Preventing Childhood Lead Poisoning," Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. <https://www.cdc.gov/lead-prevention/prevention/index.html>

"Lead," Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). <https://www.epa.gov/lead>

"Protect Your Family from Lead in Your Home," EPA. <https://www.epa.gov/lead/protect-your-family-lead-your-home-english>

"The Lead-Safe Certified Guide to Renovate Right," EPA. https://www.epa.gov/sites/production/files/documents/r_english_color_book.pdf

"Lead," National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences. <https://www.niehs.nih.gov/health/topics/agents/lead/index.cfm>

"Lead Poisoning," World Health Organization - <https://www.who.int/health-topics/lead-poisoning>