

Effects of Lead on Children

Lead exposure is especially harmful for children. Lead replaces iron, calcium, and other minerals in the blood that children need to grow up healthy and strong. Low levels of lead can harm growing organs, muscles, and bone. Low levels of lead can slow a child's development and cause learning and behavioral problems.

Exposure to even very low levels of lead can cause health problems in children, including: learning disabilities, attention deficit disorder, and decreased IQ, speech, language, and behavior problems

Children with exposure to low levels of lead may not look or act sick. Some children, however, have symptoms (changes in or increased...) such as:

- headaches;
- stomachaches, dizziness, or throwing up;
- muscle and joint weakness or pain;
- reduced attention span;
- metallic taste in the mouth;
- tiredness (loss of energy) or hyperactivity;
- trouble sleeping;
- constipation;
- loss of appetite;
- irritability or crankiness;
- loss of weight; and
- loss of interest in playing.

Parents often don't notice these signs because they usually go away quickly or look like other illnesses like the flu. Only a blood test can tell for sure if a child has too much lead in their body. Blood lead tests can find lead in the blood even when a child looks and acts normal.

Children exposed to higher levels of lead, will have more severe symptoms like vomiting or seizures (convulsions). High lead levels can even make a child go into a coma or die. Children with high lead levels need medical treatment immediately to reduce the amount of lead in their bodies.

Treatment for lead poisoning is not a cure, but it can help to get lead circulating in the bloodstream out of the body through the urine. Blood must be tested again, after treatment, to make sure the lead level is reduced sufficiently to prevent a seizure, coma, or death. The best protection is to prevent a child from being poisoned from the start by removing the sources of exposure.

More information

- [What Every Caregiver Should Know About Lead](#)
- [Chart of Estimated Percentage of children aged 3 years or younger](#) tested in 2007 who were found to have elevated blood lead levels, by Chicago Community Area
- [Table of Estimated Percentage of children tested in 2007](#) who were found to have elevated blood lead levels, by Chicago Community Area

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September 2009