



Keep Kids Safe from Lead Poisoning

Oh, the joy and excitement of witnessing the many "Firsts" in our children's lives. The first time our baby rolls over, sits, crawls, stands or walks. It's a whole new world to explore! But, with the new mobility for baby comes increased dangers. One of those dangers in the home is the increased potential for lead poisoning. We have heard a lot about lead poisoning recently in the news . . . including recalls of toys. So what's the big deal?



Where's the lead? Lead is a metallic element that is poison to our bodies. The two major sources of lead poisoning in the U.S. have been from industry. Airborne lead from leaded gasoline and lead chips and dust from lead-based paint have produced lasting contamination of our environment. Lead based paint was used in many homes

before it was banned in 1978 and tetraethyl lead was removed from gasoline in the 1970's. (Leaving us with . . . you know . . . unleaded gasoline.) Since this time, there has been a dramatic decrease in the number of lead poisoned children in the U.S. However, there remain pockets of communities that continue to have lead poisoned children, primarily as a result of deteriorated paint in older housing. Benton Harbor is one of those communities with higher rates of lead poisoned children.

How do kids get lead? Lead poisoning is harmful to people of all ages, including adults, but young children are at greatest risk. They put everything in their mouths and their bodies absorb lead more easily. Peeling, chipping paint and dust generated from the deteriorated paint and outside dirt where the deteriorated paint has settled, are the two main sources of lead poisoning.

How does lead poisoning affect children? Lead may cause damage to the brain, lower IQ scores, interfere with growth, harm hearing, and may cause

behavior/learning difficulties. At high levels, lead poisoning can cause seizures, coma and death. Pregnant women can pass lead poisoning to their unborn baby. Pregnant women should talk to their doctor if they feel they may be at risk of lead exposure in the past or the present.

How do you know if your child is lead poisoned? Often a child with lead poisoning will NOT have signs or symptoms of illness. The effects of lead may not show until several years later. A simple blood test ordered by your child's doctor is the only way to know. Children should be tested at age one and two years and more often if needed. Your child's doctor can determine if a test is needed.

How can I remove lead from my home? Do not try to remove lead hazards yourself. For questions about temporary controls and permanent removal call your local health department and request to speak to a sanitarian specializing in lead. At the Berrien County Health Department contact David London or Ken Priest at 927-2960.

Your child should be lead tested if she/he:

- Lives in a high-risk zip code (including 49022)
- Lives in or visits a home built before 1950;
- Lives in or regularly visits a home built before 1978 that has had recent remodeling;
- Has a brother or sister with lead poisoning;
- Lives with an adult whose job/hobby involves lead.
- Is enrolled in Medicaid
- Is a newly arrived refugee or was internationally adopted



Protect your child from lead poisoning:

- Keep your child from eating dirt and paint chips. Keep children from putting dirty non-food items in their mouths.
- Keep your home clean. Clean weekly with wet mop and wet cloth, concentrating on windowsills, doorways, floors, and porches.
- Provide your child a diet high in dairy, fruits and vegetables and foods high in iron.
- Report to your landlord about peeling/chipping paint and request repairs in writing.
- Take shoes off before entering home
- Wash child's toys weekly
- Wash child's hands before meals & bedtime

Special thanks to Barby Carter, a public health nurse and lead expert, for help with this article.

The Berrien County Health Department has five locations to serve you:

Benton Harbor		Niles		Three Oaks
769 Pipestone	M-139 Office	School Based	1205 N. Front St.	21 N. Elm
P.O. Box 706	2106 S. M-139	870 Colfax Ave	684-2800	756-2008
926-7121	927-5623	925-4500		

Or visit us on the web at www.berriencohthdept.org

Berrien County Health

Department:
Preventing Disease,
Prolonging Life and
Protecting the
Health of the
Community.



Cancer Prevention and Control

October is Cancer Prevention and Control Month. Cancer is a devastating disease, and the Berrien County Health Department wants you to be informed about what you can do to prevent cancer, and the resources available to detect and treat it early. For more information about any of these topics, **please call the health department at 926-7121.**



Spread the Word!

During Lead Awareness Week (10/22-10/26/07), canvassers will be going door-to-door distributing information about lead poisoning in Benton Harbor. For questions on how you or your organization may help, contact Charmaine Lipkins-Davis at the Capstone Family Center at 926-1979 ext. 26.

Attend the Lead Safe Kids Coalition meetings held monthly at the M-139 Building of Berrien County Health Department. Call Theresa Green ahead for exact dates and times at 927-5607.

The Health Department can do lead testing for children, and may be able to test paint in homes where children with high blood lead levels are living. Please call 926-7121 ext. 5212 (Nursing) or 927-5623 (Environmental Health) for more information.

Other lead information:

MI Department of Community Health-
1-888-322-4453

Websites: www.epa.gov/lead
www.michigan.gov/leadsafe

For recalled toys visit Consumer Product Safety Commission at 1-800-638-2772 or www.cpsc.gov

This page is sponsored by the Berrien County Health Department

