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National Center for Environmental Health



CDC's Lead Poisoning Prevention Program

Lead poisoning is entirely preventable. However, nearly half a million children living in the United States have lead levels in their blood that are high enough to cause irreversible damage to their health.

- Lead poisoning affects virtually every system in the body, and often occurs with no distinctive symptoms.
- Lead can damage a child's central nervous system, kidneys, and reproductive system and, at higher levels, can cause coma, convulsions, and death.
- Even low levels of lead are harmful and are associated with decreased intelligence, impaired neurobehavioral development, decreased stature and growth, and impaired hearing acuity



Peeling lead-based paint is a major source of lead poisoning among children.

CDC works to prevent lead poisoning through a variety of efforts.

- CDC provides funding to states, cities, and counties for primary prevention, and provides additional funding to several states for surveillance. These programs ensure that screening, lead-hazard abatement, new legislation, and other prevention mechanisms occur throughout the country.
- In November 1997, CDC issued new guidance for the prevention of childhood lead poisoning. This guidance calls for public health leadership at the state and local levels. CDC will continue to work with states and local areas to improve capacity and direct science.
- CDC has established a national surveillance system for children with elevated blood lead levels.
- CDC helped to initiate federal activities to reduce lead in gasoline, which brought about declines in average blood lead levels in the U.S. population. Data from the most recent National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES) show that the percentage of U.S. children with elevated blood lead levels has dropped from 88.2% in the late 1970s to 4.4% in the early 1990s. ([NHANES Chart](#))

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