Background: Childhood Lead Exposure and Poisoning

Lead is an element found throughout our environment, and it is highly toxic – especially to babies, toddlers and young children.

Effects on Children
Exposure to lead affects a child in many ways. Lead collects in the blood, tissues and bones, and can harm the kidneys, stunt growth and affect balance. Over the long term, children can experience developmental problems, learning difficulties, behavior disorders and a lower IQ.

Although there are not always early symptoms, exposure to lead can eventually cause symptoms such as abdominal pain, vomiting, constipation, change in appetite and irritability.

Typical Exposure Sources
Children become poisoned by lead from breathing lead contaminated dust or ingesting contaminated foods, liquids, or non-food items.

The primary source of lead exposure for children continues to be lead-based paint. Lead was banned as a paint additive in the U.S. in 1978, but thousands of older homes still pose a threat. As old lead paint flakes, chips, or turns to dust, it can contaminate surfaces in the home and exposed soil areas outdoors.

In addition to lead-based paint, other exposure sources may exist in the child’s environment, for example, food contaminated by glazed pottery such as bean pots, water that may be contaminated from lead solder in old pipes, certain traditional home remedies, lead products used in hobbies such as stained glass making, even fishing weights. Bare soil near high-traffic areas may also be contaminated by automobile emissions deposited before leaded gasoline was banned.

If a parent works in an industry that exposes him or her to lead, it is important to change clothes before returning home, and to wash work clothes separately from other family laundry.

If a child’s blood test reveals lead exposure, the immediate goal is to find and remove sources of exposure as quickly as possible.

We are your resource for publications like these:

- **Poster: Getting a Good Specimen**
  Reviews techniques for getting good capillary and venous samples, with detailed photos of supplies currently shipped by the DSHS lab

- **Educator’s brochure: What All New Parents Need to Know…**
  Provides background for provider staff who want to educate parents about lead poisoning

- **Bilingual flyer series: How Lead Affects Your Child’s Health**
  A series of five flyers, bilingual (English/Spanish) front and back

- **Brochure: Protect Your Children from Lead Poisoning**
  A brochure available in either English or Spanish provides basic information to parents who may have limited reading skills

To learn more about our services, contact your local health department’s Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Program:

Your Local Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Program (CLPPP)

Is Here to Help You

Keep Texas Children Safe From Lead

This publication was supported by a grant from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Contents are solely the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily represent the view of CDC.
We publish information on childhood lead poisoning topics for your staff and your patients:

- Exposure Sources
  - It’s not always the paint!
  - We can provide information on sources of lead exposure including environmental and workplace contamination, dietary sources such as imported candies, and exposure from traditional home remedies.

- Case Management
  - There aren’t always symptoms!
  - We can provide resources such as questionnaires to help you screen families for risk factors and guidelines on current testing and reporting requirements. In addition, we can refer you to medical specialists in the field of childhood lead poisoning treatment.

- Prevention
  - It’s entirely preventable!
  - We can help your staff educate parents and families about how childhood lead poisoning occurs, how to prevent it and where they can go for help.

Local CLPPPs make a variety of services available to healthcare providers:

- patient screening and case management
- sources for general and clinical information
- current reporting requirements
- patient education resources and literature
- patient referral sources such as nutritional counseling
- family referrals such as Children’s Health Insurance Program and Texas Health Steps
- monitoring of referrals
- presentations
- environmental investigations
- needs assessments
- prevention strategies

Lead poisoning is the primary environmental hazard faced by children in Texas.

- Lead poisoning is more likely to occur in children living in poverty.
- In 2003, census estimates placed 13.1% of Texas families below the poverty level—over 711,000 Texas families are now living in poverty.
- The effects of chronic lead exposure in a young child may not show up until adolescence.

How to comply with blood lead reporting laws:

Know the Law:

As of June 1, 2003, immediate reporting to the Texas Child Lead Registry is required for all blood lead tests for persons age 14 or younger.

Physicians, laboratories, hospitals, clinics and other healthcare facilities must report.

Provide Complete Data:

Complete data helps protect all the children of Texas. By tracking all childhood lead cases—using the data you provide—the state can better identify risk factors for all children as well as offer individual follow-up based on a child’s test results.

Make sure your report includes:

- Child’s complete name
- Date of birth
- Gender
- Ethnicity
- Race
- Address
- Blood lead result
- Type of blood sample (capillary or venous)
- Name and address of testing laboratory
- Test date

Report:

- By phone: (toll-free) 1 (800) 588-1248
- By fax: (512) 458-7699
- By mail: Epidemiology and Surveillance Unit Department of State Health Services PO Box 149347 Austin, Texas 78756

If you need a reporting form call our toll free number: 1 (800) 588-1248, or download a form from our web site:
http://www.dshs.state.tx.us/lead/providers.shtm

Our website is your resource:

The Texas CLPPP website provides easy access to information about lead poisoning prevention, as well as reporting forms, requirements and guidelines, and links to other resources.

http://www.dshs.state.tx.us/lead