

Know Your Home.....Protect Your Family from Lead Poisoning

As summertime approaches, many of us focus on improving our home environments. As you begin to open and close your windows and doors, paint, or renovate your home, be aware of the age of the property you are working on; If it was built before 1978, it can be a source of lead-based paint exposure. Most childhood lead poisoning is a result of exposure to the dust from deteriorating paint as it ages, is damaged by water or is disturbed during home renovation. Deteriorated paint creates a fine dust in windowsills, floors, carpets, porches and in the soil surrounding a home. This dust can subsequently be ingested or inhaled by children, adults and pets who reside in or visit the home or apartment.

In addition, we have seen a substantial increase in product recalls for toys, inexpensive jewelry, clothing items, vinyl lunch boxes, and children's furniture that are imported with lead in them after manufacture in another country. To date, we have not been able to document lead poisoning directly related to these sources.

During the first five years of life, children experience rapid growth and development of the brain and central nervous system, or "hard wiring," for future cognitive and behavioral functioning. Lead poisoning, however, interferes with this vitally important growth and development. Young children are exposed to lead through normal activities, such as playing on the floor or in dirt, pulling up at windowsills. Young children ingest lead dust and lead fragments through age-appropriate hand-to-mouth behaviors; dust on their hands or toys is transferred into the mouth quite easily.

Since children absorb a greater proportion of the lead they consume, the effects on the developing child's nervous system, hearing, vision, cognition and behavior can be devastating. The damage from lead poisoning is permanent and irreversible.

Consequences of lead poisoning include: reduced intellectual functioning, attention deficit/hyperactive behaviors, diminished capacity to learn, increased anti-social and delinquent behavior, reading disabilities and possible permanent brain damage.

Furthermore, some studies indicate that lead exposure during pregnancy may increase the risk of premature birth, low birth weight and miscarriage. Clearly, lead poisoning affects the entire community and adds significant costs to education, welfare, health, juvenile and criminal justice systems.

Michigan is among the top seven states in the U.S. for the occurrence of childhood lead poisoning. In 2007, 2,031 children were identified with elevated blood lead levels. And because testing is not universal in Michigan, it is estimated that 16,566 children are potentially lead-poisoned, but not identified. While lead poisoning is one of the most common pediatric environmental health problems, it is in fact entirely preventable.

Two strategies include remediation of lead paint hazards in homes and the regular blood testing of at-risk children.

So, as you prepare for summer, keep the following precautions in mind:

- Have your children tested for lead poisoning at age one and two.
- Adults working with lead, occupationally or with a lead related hobby, should be tested annually.
- Wash your children's hands before meals, after playing and at bedtime.
- Wash toys frequently with warm soapy water.

- Use lead safe work practices to protect yourself and your children. For details, go to www.hud.gov/offices/lead/training/LBPguide.pdf
- Subscribe to the free Consumer Product Safety Commission web site for product recalls and alerts; go to www.cpsc.gov to register.
- Clean dust, dirt and paint chips from windowsills with soap and water
- Mop floors instead of sweeping.
- Use a HEPA vacuum for carpets; some health departments will loan them.
- Take shoes off and leave them at the door.
- Leave work clothes away from your family and wash them separately.
- Wet scrape and sand paint to avoid creating dust; repaint with two coats of paint.
- Cover bare soil with wood chips, grass or plants.
- Do not power wash or sand blast outdoor painted surfaces.

For more information contact the Michigan Department of Community Health
Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Program at 1-888-322-4453 or (517) 335-8885
or visit our website at www.michigan.gov/leadsafe