



Promoting and protecting public health

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Douglas County Health Department and the Omaha Healthy Kids Alliance Endorse National Center for Healthy Homes Information on Lead and Toys

Lead is a well-known hazard. Children may be exposed to lead from toys that have been made in other countries and then imported into the country, or from antique toys and collectibles passed down through generations. The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) issues recalls of toys that could potentially expose children to lead. Consumers wishing to test objects to determine lead content are faced with several choices.

How to obtain more information about recalls

The CPSC asks that parents search their children's toys for items that have been recalled and take them away from children immediately. Photos and descriptions of recalled toys can be found by visiting the CPSC (www.cpsc.gov) website or by calling 1-800-638-2772.

Lead in toy jewelry has also been found in many retail stores. If you have concerns about lead in toy jewelry see <http://www.cdc.gov/nceh/lead/faq/jewelry> or visit www.cpsc.gov for past and present recalled items.

Lead may be used in two aspects of toy manufacturing.

Paint: Lead may be found in the paint on toys. Lead paint was banned for use in house paint, on products marketed to children, and dishes or cookware in the United States in 1978. However, it is still widely used in other countries and therefore, the reason it can be found in imported toys. It may also be found on older toys made in the United States before the ban in 1978.

Plastics: Lead may also be used in plastic toys to stabilize the plastic molecules from heat. It makes the plastic more flexible and softens the plastic so that it can go back to its original shape. The use of lead in plastics has not been banned. When the plastic is exposed to substances such as sunlight, air, and detergents the chemical bond between the lead and plastic breaks down and forms a dust.

How your child may be exposed.

Lead is invisible to the naked eye and has no smell. Children may be exposed to lead from consumer products through normal hand-to-mouth activity. As part of normal

development, young children often place their toys, fingers, and other objects in their mouth, which puts them in contact with the lead paint or dust.

How to test toys and other consumer products for lead.

There are several different testing methods that can be conducted to test lead in toys. Consumers can send products to a certified laboratory for analysis. It is important to make sure the laboratory is recognized under the EPA's Lead Laboratory Proficiency Analytical Testing Program <http://www.epa.gov/lead/pubs/nllaplist.pdf>. Some lab testing methods may result in the destruction of a product. Be sure to ask the laboratory about their testing methods, procedures and costs prior to authorizing testing services from a certified laboratory.

X-Ray Fluorescence (XRF) is a non-destructive method of testing for lead content. It has been used successfully for measuring lead in soil and paint, including paint on children's toys, furniture, and other objects. Lead-based paint inspectors and some laboratories may have these devices, which exist in both portable and fixed forms. Portable XRF devices allow consumers to have items tested in more convenient locations like schools. Consumers can also request measurements of lead in paint in their home using these devices.

Consumers should only use state or EPA licensed or certified lead-based paint inspectors to perform these tests. A list of such inspectors can usually be obtained from the State Health Department or by contacting the National Lead Information Center at 1-800-424-LEAD. Inspectors should confirm that the XRF instrument they use has a Performance Characteristics Sheet, which is an independent evaluation of the device from the federal government. When testing your toys with a XRF analyzer, safe levels for toys read both at 600 ppm and 1mg/cm² or less for lead. Cost per reading depends on the number of samples to be analyzed and the inspector's time.

Do-it-yourself swab kits are available but they are much less reliable and may provide false readings. This is often due to the presence of a product overcoating. At the time of testing the overcoat may be fully intact, not allowing the test swab to make direct contact with the paint underneath, resulting in a false sense of security that the toy is safe. Over time the over coat may dissipate exposing potential lead hazards.

What to do if you are concerned about your child's exposure.

If you have any reason to suspect that your child has been exposed to lead, have your child tested immediately. Your child's health care provider can help you decide whether to perform a blood test to see if your child has an elevated lead level. A blood lead test is the only way you can tell if your child has an elevated lead level. Children with elevated blood lead levels often have no symptoms. Your health care provider can recommend treatment if your child has been exposed to lead.

The Douglas County Healthy Department recommends that all children receive blood lead testing at 1, 2 and 3 years of age and again at 4, 5 and 6 if the child is at risk for exposure.

Children could be at risk if they have been exposed to hazardous imported products, live or visit a home built before 1978, receive Medicaid benefits and or live in a Superfund area. Contact the local EPA information center to see if your home or property is within the Superfund area at 1-877-LEAD-411 or log on to www.epa.gov.

The State of Nebraska mandates that all children at ages of 1 and 2 years old, receiving Medicaid benefits have annual blood lead testing. If your child receives Medicaid benefits, blood lead testing can be conducted free of charge.

Local Action

Douglas County Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Program is in partnership with Omaha Healthy Kids Alliance who provides a comprehensive approach through collaboration, coordination and education to prevent and eliminate childhood lead poisoning in Omaha. For more information, visit the Omaha Healthy Kids Alliance website at www.omahahealthykids.org or call the Omaha lead hotline at 1-877-LEAD-411 to be connected to them and partnering agencies.

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