

Environmental Issues in Childcare Settings: Lead








Childcare providers are in a unique position to observe children for many hours in a daily setting and can serve as a first alert in noticing signs and symptoms of ongoing illness or health conditions caused by environmental contaminants in a child’s living/play space.

What is Lead Poisoning?

Lead poisoning is when lead, a naturally occurring, heavy metal, builds up in a person's body. This can cause behavior and learning problems. Lead is found in older homes’ pipes and paint, and some jewelry and toys. In Pennsylvania, nearly 9,000 young children suffer from lead poisoning each year (Preventing Childhood Lead Exposure in Pennsylvania, 2021).

Even children that appear healthy can have high levels of lead accumulated in their blood, brain, and bones. Lead poisoning can lead to multiple health issues and can affect people of all ages, but children aged 6 and younger are especially at risk.

What are Common Sources of Lead in Childcare Settings?

<p>Dust from lead-based paint from older buildings</p> 	<p>Lead-contaminated soil</p> 	<p>Drinking water from lead pipes and faucets</p> 	<p>Some toys, and jewelry</p> 	<p>Some cosmetics & folk remedies</p> 
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Would You Recognize the Signs of a Child Exposed to Lead?

Children with lead poisoning may experience different symptoms depending on the level of exposure.

Low Level Exposure	Moderate Level Exposure	High Level Exposure
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Irritability • Lethargy, mild fatigue • Pain, burning, tingling, or itching • Occasional abdominal discomfort 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Joint pain • Constipation, vomiting, abdominal pain, weight loss • Difficulty concentrating • Muscular tiredness or weakness, tremors • Headaches • General fatigue 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Colic (intermittent, severe abdominal cramps) • Seizure, loss of consciousness • Paralysis

Adapted from ATSDR Clinical Assessment Signs & Symptoms of Lead Toxicity
https://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/csem/leadtoxicity/signs_and_symptoms.html

Long-term exposure to lead in children can lead to developmental and behavioral issues.

Decreased learning & memory 	Decreased verbal ability 	Early signs of hyperactivity or ADHD 	Impaired speech & hearing 	Lowered IQ 
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To view CDC's Developmental Milestones for Children, visit <https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/actearly/milestones/>

What Can You Do?

- ✓ Children should wash their hands often, especially after they come in from being outside.
- ✓ Clean & remove dust from areas where children sleep, eat, & play.
- ✓ Be aware of recalls on children's products. Visit CDC's recall website to learn more: <https://www.cdc.gov/nceh/lead/docs/recalls-due-to-lead-hazards.html>
- ✓ Ensure that children eat foods high in calcium, iron, and vitamin C. Learn more from the EPA: https://www.epa.gov/sites/default/files/2020-01/documents/fight_lead_poisoning_with_a_healthy_diet_2019.pdf
- ✓ Use teacher resources, coloring sheets, and infographics to educate children about lead. Find CDC's lead resources here: <https://www.cdc.gov/nceh/lead/resources/communication-resources.html>
- ✓ Consider having your facility inspected and remediated for lead, especially if it was built before 1978. These facilities are more likely to have lead-based paint, lead water service lines, or lead plumbing. Encourage parents to have their young children screened for lead.

For More Information

CDC Lead Poisoning



PA DOH Lead Poisoning



Preventing Childhood Lead Exposure in PA



Contact the Division of Environmental Health Epidemiology:



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