



## OCTOBER 2007 HEALTH BULLETIN

### *Preventing Lead Poisoning*

The news is filled with numerous recalls on products such as children's toys, children's jewelry, crafts, office supplies, clothing, furniture, and food ware due to high levels of lead in the products. Lead was added to the paint or plastic during the making of these products. Young children can ingest unsafe levels of lead from these items. For more information on the specific products that have been recalled and what you should do about them contact <http://www.cpsc.gov/> or your local health department.

Cooperative Extension Service

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[www.ca.uky.edu/hes/?p=6](http://www.ca.uky.edu/hes/?p=6)



#### What is lead and where is it found?

Lead is a poisonous metal known to be harmful to man. Prior to 1950, lead was commonly used in household paints and gasoline. Most Kentucky homes built before 1978 contain lead paint. Lead can get into drinking water from certain types of plumbing fixtures. Soil may be contaminated by paint from old homes and buildings or the days of leaded gasoline. More recently, lead has been found in toys, furniture, jewelry, household items such as mini or vertical blinds, and clothing if made in other countries.



#### How does lead enter the body?

Lead enters the body either through the mouth by eating or breathing or through the skin by having a cut or scrape. Once in the body, lead travels to the kidneys, liver, lungs, brain, spleen, muscles, and heart. After several weeks the body begins to confuse lead with calcium and begins to store the lead in bones and teeth.



#### What are the adverse health effects of lead?

It is easier for an adult to get rid of lead from the body than for a child. An adult will excrete approximately 99% of lead from the body through urine, sweat, and feces whereas a child will only excrete about 32%. Children under the age of six are the most vulnerable to lead's toxic effects due to growth of the brain and nervous system. Exposure to lead, even low levels in children of this age, may lead to decreased IQ, hearing problems, decreased overall growth, problems concentrating, behavioral problems, and kidney damage. High levels of exposure may lead to mental retardation, coma, and death.





**What are the signs and symptoms of lead poisoning?**

Low to moderate exposure to lead can result in the following symptoms: abdominal pain, constipation, vomiting, change in appetite, irritability, aggressive behavior, difficulty sleeping, headaches, anemia, and decrease or regression of previous skills learned. High levels of exposure may result in vomiting, staggering, muscle weakness, seizures, and/or coma.



**If you or your child have any of the following signs and symptoms and you have known exposure to lead seek medical attention for a lead screening and physical examination.**

**How to protect your family against lead poisoning**

Here are some tips for protecting your family against lead poisoning:

- Make sure you do not have any of the recalled products in your home.
- If you live in an older home and suspect you have lead paint on your walls contact Kentucky's Environmental Lead Program at (502) 564-4537 or the Kentucky Child Lead Poisoning Prevention Program at (502) 564-2154 for a home lead screening.
- Throw out old painted toys if unsure they contain lead paint.
- Wash hands before eating.
- Keep children's play areas clean and toys clean.
- Do not allow your child to chew on windowsills or other painted area.
- Clean or remove your shoes before entering your home.



Want to learn more about health in Kentucky? If so, check us out on the Web at : [www.ca.uky.edu/hes/?p=6](http://www.ca.uky.edu/hes/?p=6) You'll be glad you did!



**The amount of damage or adverse effects of lead poisoning depends upon the amount of lead you are exposed to and how long you are exposed to it.**

*Insert your text here*

The October 2007 Adult Health Bulletin was prepared by: Peggy Riley RN, MSN, Extension Specialist for Nursing.

Sources  
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2007) General lead information: questions and answers. Available online at <http://cdc.gov/nceh/lead/faq/about.htm>.

