

Adult Lead Poisoning

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Lead is a highly toxic metal that has been commonly used in many household, industrial and automobile products — such as paint, solder, batteries, brass, car radiators, bullets, and pottery. Too much lead in the body, or lead poisoning, can cause serious and permanent health problems.

If you need help accessing or understanding this information, contact AHS.HealthyHomes@vermont.gov.

What are the health effects of lead?

When lead is absorbed by the body, it replaces other needed metals (for example, calcium, iron and zinc) and interferes with your body's essential functions. You may not have symptoms of lead poisoning until your blood lead levels are quite high. Because these symptoms may occur slowly or may be caused by other things, lead poisoning can be easily overlooked.

The symptoms of adult lead poisoning may include stomach discomfort, constipation, loss of appetite, headache, muscle and joint pain, tiredness, irritability or anxiety, and high blood pressure.

How does lead get into your body?

You can be exposed to lead by breathing in lead particles or swallowing lead-contaminated dust, water or food.

Exposure to lead can come from **your job** (for example, manufacturing, construction, automotive repair, or mining) or from **your hobbies** (for example, making stained glass, target shooting, casting bullets, making ceramics, furniture refinishing, or home renovations).

How to reduce or prevent lead exposure from your job

Industries that use lead should provide a safe environment for their workers. Find more information from the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) at www.cdc.gov/niosh/lead/.

If you are exposed to lead on the job, follow these basic safety guidelines:

- Do not eat, drink, chew gum, or use tobacco products in any work area.
- Thoroughly wash your hands, face, forearms, and any other exposed skin surfaces, or shower onsite (if available) before leaving the work area to eat or use tobacco products and at the end of the day.
- Wash your work clothes as a separate load of laundry.

- Keep and use separate street clothes and work clothes, including boots, shoes, and hats.
 - Change before getting in your personal vehicle to avoid contamination. Place work items in a bag if you cannot leave them at the worksite.
 - Shower and change your clothes as soon as you arrive home and before touching anyone in your family, if you are unable to at work.

How to reduce or prevent lead exposure from your hobbies

- Lead was banned in house paint in 1978. If you are **renovating a home built before 1978**, assume it has lead paint, stain or varnish.
 - Be mindful that any painted surfaces may have lead paint under more recent layers of paint.
 - Lead dust may be present around friction surfaces, such as windows and doors, and on floors.
 - Use lead-safe work practices if doing your own home renovations or hire a Lead-Safe RRPM licensed professional. Learn more at www.HealthVermont.gov/RRPM#ask.
 - Never dry sand old painted surfaces.
 - Clean hard surface floors and painted surfaces with wet cleaning materials.
 - Vacuum carpets with a HEPA-rated vacuum cleaner.
- Be aware that **older furniture, architectural features or salvaged building materials** such as doors, windows, or moldings may have been painted or stained with lead paint, stain, or varnish in the past. Lead will leach into the wood, so even if the old paint is removed, lead may still be present in the bare wood.
- If **target shooting** indoors, make sure that ventilators are turned on.
- If you **cast your own bullets**, make sure that it is done under a ventilated hood or in a well-ventilated area.
- If **soldering**, use lead free solder, especially for stained glass work.
- If you are an **artist**, either use lead-free paints or handle lead-based paints cautiously. Wear an apron and keep your work area clean.
- If you make your own **maple syrup**, use only lead-free materials.
- If you work with **ceramics**, investigate the clays and glazes to determine if they are lead-free. If not, do not use those ceramic creations for serving foods or drinks.
- Properly dispose of any old lead **fishing sinkers**. Do not put them in your mouth.