

Lead – preventing exposure in childcare centres

Lead can be hazardous to health.

Lead may be encountered in childcare centres.

Carefully manage all exposure sources and ensure staff and children have a high level of personal hygiene.

Lead and your health

Exposure to lead is linked to harmful effects on organs and bodily functions. Elevated blood lead levels can cause anaemia, kidney problems, and neurological or developmental effects.

Lead can harm people of all ages, but the risks are greater in pregnant women, infants and children. Other factors that influence the impact of lead on an individual are their age and health status, the amount of lead and the duration of exposure.

Potential sources of lead in childcare centres

Lead can be found in the environment in many forms, including in:

- lead-based paint on buildings built before 1970, and lead paint flakes around structures
- lead dust from industrial and domestic sources in soil, and in roof and wall cavities
- lead waste from industrial sources in soil

- some household products
- some vegetables and plants grown in contaminated soil
- eggs and other animal products from animals reared on contaminated soil.



Lead exposure in childcare centres

Directors, managers and staff of early childhood education and care facilities need to be aware of potential sources of lead on their premises and be able to identify any dangers so that exposure to lead can be reduced.

Early childhood education and care facilities need to manage lead hazards because:

- lead exposure poses a significant risk to young children
- young children can spend a large part of their day in care
- children often place their hands in their mouths
- management and staff have a role in educating parents and children about health and identifying sources of lead.

Take extra care if:

- there is a possibility that your building contains lead paint

- your centre is built on or near land used for industrial purposes
- your centre is near an industrial lead source (such as a lead smelter or mine)
- your centre has fill (soil) that could be contaminated with lead
- there are lead-contaminated building renovations, or demolition, occurring nearby.

See 'Where to get advice' for more information.

If you suspect a child in your care has been exposed to lead, you should advise the parent or guardian to visit their doctor.

For more information regarding the health effects of lead, please refer to the NHMRC Statement and Information Paper on the health effects of lead at www.nhmrc.gov.au/health-topics/lead-blood-levels.

Preventing lead exposure in childcare centres



You can prevent lead exposure by removing the lead hazard from the environment. Improved hygiene can also significantly reduce a child's exposure and ability to absorb lead. Prevention measures include:

- ensuring children wash their hands and faces before eating or having a nap. Skin must then be well dried, as wet skin attracts dirt and dust
- keeping indoor soil toys inside and outdoor toys outside
- regularly cleaning the facility, play equipment, toys and dummies
- using a vacuum with a high-efficiency particulate air (HEPA) filter

- eliminating the use of consumer products that contain lead
- ensuring all bare patches of soil are covered with grass or other material
- washing fruit and vegetables before they are eaten
- encouraging children to throw away food that falls on the floor.

Where to get advice

- Call the EPA's Environment Line on 131 555.
- Visit the EPA lead safety web page at www.epa.nsw.gov.au/your-environment/household-building-and-renovation/lead-safety.
- Ask your doctor for information about blood tests and the effects of lead on your health.
- Contact The LEAD Group on 1800 626 086 or visit lead.org.au for independent advice on lead contamination and testing.

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