



Toys and Childhood Lead Exposure

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.

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.

Plastic: 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 plastics 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 a toy for lead.

The only accurate way to test a toy for lead is by a certified laboratory. Do-it-yourself kits are available. However these kits do not indicate how much lead is present and their reliability at detecting low levels of lead has not been determined.

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 remove the toy from your child. Your child's health care provider can help you decide whether to perform a blood test to see if your child has an elevated blood lead level. A blood lead test is the only way you can tell if your child has an elevated lead level. Most children with elevated blood lead levels have no symptoms. The health care provider can recommend treatment if your child has been exposed to lead.



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 1-800-638-2772.

Federal action

A working group of nine federal agencies has been convened to develop a comprehensive strategy to control sources of lead in food and consumer products through interagency collaboration and cooperation.

Lead in Toy Jewelry

If you have concerns about Lead in Toy Jewelry see <http://www.cdc.gov/nceh/lead/faq/jewelry.htm> for information from the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

NCHH is a national 501c3 non-profit organization dedicated to protecting children from hazards in their homes while preserving affordable housing. NCHH was founded to provide the scientific underpinnings for the lead poisoning prevention movement. Since that time, the number of homes with lead-based paint has dropped from 64 million to 38 million and the number of children with lead poisoning has dropped from 890,000 to 310,000. Today, NCHH conducts research on a broad array of housing-related health issues, including mold, radon, asthma triggers, and the promotion of green and healthy building. Additionally, NCHH engages in policy and training activities to promote decent, safe, and affordable housing in the United States.