

## **Frequently Asked Questions About Lead Paint**

### **What is Lead Paint?**

Lead paint or lead based paint (LBP) is paint containing lead, a heavy metal, that is used as pigment, with lead (II) chromate ( $\text{PbCrO}_4$ , "chrome yellow") and lead(II) carbonate ( $\text{PbCO}_3$ , "white lead") being the most common. Lead is also added to paint to speed drying, increase durability, retain a fresh appearance, and resist moisture that causes corrosion.

Although lead improves paint performance, it is a dangerous substance. It is especially damaging to children under the age of six whose bodies are still developing. Lead causes nervous system damage, stunted growth, and delayed development. It can cause kidney damage and can affect every organ system of the body. It also is dangerous to adults, and can cause reproductive problems for both men and women.

### **How are children exposed to lead?**

Young children can be exposed by:

- \* Swallowing lead dust or soil that is on their hands or other objects, such as some toys, that they put into their mouths
- \* Swallowing lead paint chips
- \* Breathing lead dust or lead contaminated air
- \* Eating food or drinking water that is contaminated with lead

One myth related to lead-based paint is that the most common cause of poisoning was eating leaded paint chips. In fact, the most common pathway of childhood lead exposure is through ingestion of lead dust through normal hand-to-mouth contact during which children swallow lead dust dislodged from deteriorated paint or leaded dust generated during remodeling or painting. Lead dust from remodeling or deteriorated paint lands on the floor near where children play and can ingest it.

### **Why is exposure to lead harmful to children?**

Scientists have found that lead can disrupt the normal growth and development of a child's brain and central nervous system.

### **What age are children most at risk for lead poisoning?**

All children less than six years old and particularly those between six months and three years are at risk of lead poisoning because:

- The first six years, particularly the first three years of life, is the time when the human brain grows the fastest, and when the critical connections in the brain and nervous system that control thought, learning, hearing, movement, behavior and emotions are formed.
- The normal behavior of children at this age are crawling, exploring, teething, putting objects in their mouth that puts them into contact with any lead that is present in their environment.

**What are the symptoms of lead poisoning in children?**

Most children with lead in their bodies will not have obvious symptoms! Lead poisoning generally causes symptoms only at very high levels, and even then those symptoms - stomachaches, anemia, are similar to those of much less serious illnesses. **Because most children with lead poisoning will not show obvious symptoms, it is important that all children be tested to detect lead poisoning.**

**What are the effects of lead poisoning in children?**

Very high levels of lead can cause seizures, severe brain damage resulting in mental retardation, coma, and even death. Lower levels can cause stomach pains and anemia. Long term exposure to lead, even at relatively low levels, have been found to be associated with decreased hearing, lower intelligence, hyperactivity, attention deficits, and learning problems in school.