



Living Lead-Safe in an Older Home

Is the paint in your home a risk to your children? Many parents are unaware of the lead paint danger that may be lurking in their home. That's why you need to know the year your home was built, so you can make informed decisions to protect your children from lead poisoning.

Lead paint is generally found in homes built before 1978. But, Maine children are up to three times more likely to be exposed to lead if they live in housing that was built before 1950. If a home contains lead paint, normal wear and tear or home renovations may produce lead dust. By far, lead dust is the most common way children are poisoned by lead. Each year, nearly 120 of Maine's children are poisoned by lead.

Lead dust can remain in a home for a long time, collecting on surfaces where children put their hands and play with toys. Then, when children put their hands and toys in their mouths, lead dust can get into and damage their growing bodies. When lead is absorbed into the body, it can cause learning disabilities, behavior problems, hearing damage, language or speech delays and lower intelligence.

You can assume that your home has lead paint if it was built before 1950 and that means you need to do the following six things to live safely with lead paint.

1. Regularly clean floors, windowsills and tabletops with a wet mop or cloth.
2. Always wash children's hands after play and before meals, naps and bedtime.
3. Frequently wipe down toys, clean stuffed animals and wash bottles or pacifiers.
4. Routinely check painted windows, doors and floors for peeling or chipping paint.
5. Ask your child's doctor about a blood lead test.
6. Learn how to renovate, repair and paint safely before beginning any home improvement projects.

If you are not sure how old your home is, you can ask your landlord or call your town office. If you want to find the exact locations of lead paint, you can test for lead using these recommended methods:

- **Home Test Kits** – For sale at hardware stores, these tests only tell you if there is lead on the surface. They will not tell you if there is lead paint covered by a layer of non-lead paint. Home test kits are not expensive and are useful for testing painted wood that is already chipped or damaged.
- **Lead Dust Wipes** – This method can test for lead dust on floors and window sills. Lead dust test kits are available from the State Health and Environmental Testing Lab at 287-8014.
- **Hire a Lead Expert** – Special equipment allows lead experts to measure lead in paint, even if it is covered by layers of newer non-lead paint. Get a list by

calling 287-2651 or visiting www.maine.gov/healthyhomes. Click on the "homeowners" link.

The bottom line: If your home was built before 1950, assume there is lead in it. Keep it clean and maintain the paint. If you are planning renovations on any house built before 1978, either hire a certified contractor, or if you are going to do it yourself test it for lead. Once you know if you have lead in your home, you can make smart decisions about cleaning, home improvements and keeping your children safe.

The MeCDC has tipsheets for parents and homeowners about lead testing and cleaning up lead in your home at www.maine.gov/healthyhomes.