



Testing Kids for Lead

Has your child been tested for lead poisoning? Most parents are only vaguely aware that lead poisoning is a health concern for young children, even though it persists as a health concern for Maine children.

So, who should be concerned about lead poisoning?

Children at risk are those under age 6 who live or spend time in homes or buildings built before 1978. But, the risk is much greater for young children who live in housing that was built before 1950. Houses built before 1950 usually have lead paint. If a home contains lead paint, normal wear and tear or renovations may produce lead dust. 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.

Lead poisoning can cause serious, long-term health effects such as behavior problems, learning disabilities, speech and language delays and lower intelligence. If you are a parent of a young child and you live in home built before 1978, you should talk to your child's doctor about getting a lead test. In fact, MaineCare requires all children be tested at 1 and 2 years. Children ages 3 to 6 years should be tested if they have not been tested before, the family has recently moved to, or done repairs or painting in, an older home. Other children at risk include those with developmental or behavioral issues and children who often swallow things that are not food or who chew on window sills.

Your child's doctor can determine if your child is at risk, but you should ask for a test if you think your child needs to be tested. After you have the test done, follow-up with your child's doctor to get the results—if the results show a lot of lead, there are things you can do to help your child. You can also call 1-866-292-3474 to speak to a nurse at the Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention to find out more about testing children for lead.

The bottom line: If your home was built before 1950, assume there is lead in it. Get your child tested for lead poisoning and learn how to live safely with lead paint to keep your family healthy.

The MeCDC has tipsheets for parents about lead testing and living safely with lead paint at www.maine.gov/healthyhomes.