

Your Child and the Environment

Guidelines for Parents Part II What Children Eat and Drink



What children eat and drink

Lead

Of all the problems caused by our environment, lead poisoning is one of the most serious. Infants and toddlers can get sick by putting their fingers in their mouths after touching lead dust, eating lead paint chips, or breathing in lead dust. Lead poisoning can cause learning disabilities, behavioral problems, anemia, or damage to the brain and kidneys.

Where can lead be found?

Lead is most often found in:

- paint that is on the inside and outside of homes built before 1978
- dust and paint chips from old paint
- soil that has lead in it
- hobby materials such as paints, solders, fishing weights, and buckshot
- food stored in certain ceramic dishes (especially if dishes were made in another country)
- older painted toys and furniture such as cribs
- tap water, especially in homes that have lead pipes
- mini-blinds manufactured outside the United States before July 1996

Children who have elevated lead levels may not look or act sick. The only way to know if your child has been exposed to lead is to have your pediatrician test your child's blood.

What You Can Do

- If your home was built before 1978, consider testing the paint for lead before beginning any work.
- If lead paint is found, learn about safe ways to handle it before any work is done.
- Clean and cover any peeling, flaking, or chipping paint with a new coat of paint, duct tape, or contact paper. It is important to check for flaking paint at window areas where children often play.
- Repair areas where paint is chipped or peeling before placing cribs, playpens, beds, or highchairs next to them.
- Check with your health department to see if lead in water is a problem in your area.
- Do not use hot tap water for mixing formula, drinking, or cooking.
- Ask your pediatrician about testing your child for lead. A blood test is the only accurate way to test for lead.
- Encourage your children to wash their hands frequently, especially before eating.
- Give your child a healthy diet that includes food high in iron and calcium.
- Before moving into a home or apartment, check with your landlord or realtor for possible lead contamination.

Pesticides

Children can be exposed to pesticides in the food they eat and the water they drink. They are used by farmers as well as in home lawn and garden care. Although they are designed to kill insects, weeds, and fungi, many pesticides are toxic to the environment and to people, especially children. Too much exposure to pesticides can cause a wide range of health problems.

What You Can Do

- Keep all pesticides out of children's reach to avoid accidental poisoning.
- Wash all fruits and vegetables with water.
- Use in-season produce as they are less likely to be heavily sprayed.
- If possible, eat foods that are grown without the use of chemical pesticides.
- Use non-chemical pest control methods in your home and garden.
- Notify neighbors before any outdoor spraying.

Drinking water

Children drink 5 to 10 times more water for their size than adults. Most of this water is tap water. The quality of tap water in most areas is protected by law. Small water supplies such as those from private wells in small trailer parks or seasonal holiday communities are not.

Many people use bottled water because they think it is better than tap water. Some brands of bottled water are better than tap water. However, other brands of bottled water may only be tap water that is bottled and sold separately. Bottled water is much more expensive than tap water, but may be necessary in some areas.

A number of possible contaminants in drinking water can make children sick. These include:

- germs
- nitrates
- heavy metals
- man-made chemicals
- radioactive particles
- by-products of the disinfecting process

Some of these contaminants are more likely to be found in surface water (water from lakes and rivers). Others are more likely to be found in ground water (water from wells and underground sources). Where you live and where your drinking water comes from have a lot to do with the kind of contaminants you need to be concerned about in your water.

The quality of water in the United States is among the best in the world, but problems do still occur. County health departments and state environmental agencies are the best sources of information about water quality in your community.

What You Can Do

- Find out the source of your water.
 - If you are on a municipal water supply, the water company is required to tell you what is in the water.
 - If your water is not regulated, have it tested yearly. Many states have laws that protect renters from water supplies that are not in good working order.
 - If you have a well, make sure your water is tested yearly and that your pump is in good working order.
- Always drink and cook with **cold** water. Contaminants can build up in hot water heaters.
- If you are not sure of your plumbing, run the water for 2 minutes each morning before using water for drinking or cooking. This flushes the pipes and reduces the chances of a contaminant getting into your water.
- If you have well water and a baby under 1 year of age, have your water tested for nitrates **before** giving it to your baby. Breastfeeding, using ready-to-feed formulas, or using bottled water is wise until you know if your water is safe. If you have questions, call your health department.

If you think your water may be contaminated with germs, you can kill most of them by boiling the water and letting it cool before use. Do not boil water for longer than 1 minute. This can cause a buildup of chemicals that may be in the water.

To learn more

Environmental Protection Agency Public Information Center
Room 311 West Towers, Mail Code 3406
401 M Street, SW
Washington, DC 20460
202/260-7751

Food and Drug Administration Consumer Affairs
Room 16-75, Mail Code HFE88
5600 Fishers Lane
Rockville, MD 20857
800/532-4440

National Coalition Against the Misuse of Pesticides
701 E Street, SE
Washington, DC 20003
202/543-5450

American Lung Association
1740 Broadway
New York, NY 10019-4374
800/LUNG-USA

Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry
Public Information Office
1600 Clifton Road, NE
Atlanta, GA 30333
404/639-0501

Pesticide Hotline
800/858-7378

EMF Hotline
800/363-2383

Safe Drinking Water Hotline
800/426-4791

Lead Hotline
800/LEAD-FYI

The information contained in this publication should not be used as a substitute for the medical care and advice of your pediatrician. There may be variations in treatment that your pediatrician may recommend based on individual facts and circumstances.

From your doctor

American Academy
of Pediatrics



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