

Saint Johns Independent.Com

Sunday, November 13, 2016

Lead poisoning is preventable

Right now in the U.S., nearly half a million children, ages one to five, have blood lead levels high enough to damage their health. Could your child be one of them?

Low levels of lead can be found in the soil, the air, the water, and on things we touch. Most often, lead from these sources isn't cause for concern, but when higher levels are present, it can be very harmful, especially to young children.

A lead-poisoned child may seem healthy, but could have learning and behavior problems, slowed growth and development, hearing and speech problems, headaches, weight loss, irritability, tiredness, hyperactivity, and even damage to the brain and nervous system. These problems can lead to lower IQ, decreased ability to pay attention and underperformance in school.

The majority of children with lead poisoning live in or spend a lot of time in a home built before 1978. Lead can be found in an older home's drinking water if it is supplied by lead pipes and plumbing fixtures. But usually, the culprit is lead-based paint, which can be toxic, especially to a young child. The older the home, the more likely it is to contain lead-based paint.

The most common places for lead-based paint to be lurking are in an older home's windows, cupboards, doors, porches, and outdoor surfaces. Something as simple as opening and closing a window painted with lead-based paint can send lead dust into the air. The dust then settles to the floor and gets on children's hands and toys, and eventually makes its way into the mouth.

Lead can be found in other places, too, like in some toys and toy jewelry. Certain hobbies and jobs that involve working with lead-based products can also pose a danger if the dust is brought into the home on clothing, shoes, hair or skin.

What can you do to reduce your child's exposure to lead?

- Before you buy an older home, ask for a lead inspection and be sure to have the water tested.
- Get your young child tested at one and two years of age, even if he seems healthy. Private insurance coverage varies, but if your child is enrolled in Medicaid, the test will be covered. Mid-Michigan District Health Department offers lead blood tests to children enrolled in the Women, Infants and Children (WIC) program. For more information, call 989-224-2195 in Clinton County, 989-875-3681 in Gratiot County, and 989-831-5237 in Montcalm County.
- Renovate safely. Common activities like sanding, cutting and replacing windows can create hazardous lead dust. If you're planning on renovating an older home, use contractors certified by the Environmental Protection Agency.
- Stay up-to-date on current recalls by visiting the Consumer Product Safety

Commission's website at www.cpsc.gov and remove recalled toys and toy jewelry as appropriate.