

Lead in Children's Toys: Questions and Answers for Parents

Which toys have been recalled?

On August 2, 2007, Fisher-Price recalled approximately 967,000 toys, including Sesame Street, Dora the Explorer, and other licensed characters. In addition, on August 14, 2007, Mattel recalled approximately 253,000 toy "Sarge" cars. On June 13, 2007, RC2 Corporation recalled approximately 1.5 million "Thomas and Friends" wooden railway toys. There also have been a number of smaller recalls for a variety of children's products this year.

For a complete list of lead-related toy recalls, visit the State Department of Health's Lead Hazard Product Recall website at <http://www.nyhealth.gov/environmental/lead/recalls/index.htm> or the Consumer Product Safety Commission's website at <http://www.cpsc.gov>.

If my child has one of these toys, does he or she need a lead test?

The State Department of Health recommends that parents discuss the need for a blood lead test with their health care provider. A blood lead test should be done for all children less than age 6 years old who have played with one of these toys, especially if the child frequently chews on toys or puts toys in his or her mouth, or has frequent hand-to-mouth activity that is typical of young children. Although there are not enough studies to know for certain, the Department of Health believes that the greatest risk of exposure to lead from toys comes from frequent chewing or mouthing on the toy, or from frequent hand-to-mouth activity. Just holding or playing with the toy with hand contact alone may not result in as much lead exposure. Parents should talk with their health care providers about the need for blood lead testing and any other questions they have about lead poisoning. Local health departments can also serve as a valuable resource on childhood lead poisoning prevention.

As a reminder, **all** children should receive routine blood lead tests at age one and again at age two.

What should be done with toys that have been recalled?

Children should not be allowed to play with recalled toys. Put the toys in a place where children cannot find them, until the toys can be returned or destroyed as directed. Because each recall is different, the State Department of Health recommends that you check the recall notice to learn how to return the toy for a refund or replacement. Recall notices are available through the Department's website at <http://www.health.state.ny.us/environmental/lead/recalls/index.htm> or the Consumer Product Safety Commission's website at <http://www.cpsc.gov>.

What is lead?

Lead is a metal found in the earth, and it is a poison. For years, lead was used in paint, gasoline, plumbing and many other items. Lead is still in some kinds of pottery and old painted surfaces, toys and furniture. As these things are used or get worn out, the lead they contain can spread. **Lead has also more recently been found in some children's toys, and children's jewelry and charms.**

What is lead poisoning?

Lead poisoning occurs when a person swallows or breathes in pieces of lead or lead dust. Often the lead dust or pieces are too small to see. When lead gets into the body, levels of lead in the person's blood rise and can be measured with a blood test. Lead also gets into other body organs, including bones and the brain. Lead poisoning can cause problems with a child's growth, behavior, and ability to learn. The federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) have defined an elevated blood lead level as 10 micrograms per deciliter or higher. Blood lead levels 10 micrograms per deciliter or higher require follow-up by your health care provider.

How do children get lead poisoning?

A child can get lead poisoning by swallowing or breathing in lead. Often, lead poisoning is caused by lead you can't even see. Dust and paint chips from chipped and peeling lead paint are still the number one source of childhood lead poisoning. However, there is a risk of lead poisoning from other sources such as jewelry, toys, imported food, pottery, cosmetics and traditional medicines that contain lead.

Why are young children at greatest risk for lead poisoning?

Young children spend a lot of time on the floor. They like to put their hands, toys, and other things in their mouths. This raises their chances of swallowing lead dust and paint chips. Children's bodies are growing quickly and are more affected by lead. Only a tiny amount of lead is needed to harm a young, growing child.

Does New York require routine lead testing?

Health care providers in the state are required to test **every child** for lead at age 1 and again at age 2. Health care providers are also required to do a lead risk assessment for all pregnant women and all children up to age six at least once a year, and to do a blood lead test for children or pregnant women who are at risk for lead exposure.

The purpose of routine lead screening is to identify children who have elevated blood lead levels because of exposure to lead. While children can be exposed to lead from a number of possible sources, lead dust and paint chips from chipped and peeling lead paint are still the leading source of childhood lead poisoning. New York State has the largest number and percentage of old housing in the entire nation. Children who live in old housing (all housing built before 1978, but especially housing built before 1950) may be at risk for exposure to lead if the paint is chipping, peeling, or otherwise wearing down due to disrepair, or renovation and remodeling if lead-safe work practices are not followed. Of the approximately 5,000 children diagnosed with lead poisoning each year in New York State, the vast majority are exposed to lead from lead paint in housing.

How do I get a lead test for my child?

If your health care provider determines the need for a lead test, he or she will provide a prescription. Parents take their child and the prescription to a laboratory, where the laboratory technician takes a small amount of blood from the child. Your health care provider will receive the results of the test from the lab a few days later. Some health care providers may take blood from the child in their offices.

Why is it important for my child to be tested?

If your health care provider recommends testing, it is important to get the test so that if your child has an elevated blood lead level, steps can be taken to eliminate the source of lead and monitor your child's health.

What if a child doesn't have health insurance that will cover a blood lead test?

If a child does not have health insurance, or insurance does not cover blood lead tests, contact the local health department. They can help the child get a blood lead test. They will also help parents to get health insurance for their child.

How do I know if a child has lead poisoning?

At lower blood lead levels, a child with lead poisoning usually does not look or feel sick. The only sure way to know is to get a blood lead test. In the past, lead exposure was often not diagnosed until a child had a very high blood lead level (≥ 70 mcg/dL) with symptoms of lead toxicity such as severe fatigue, decreased muscle coordination, seizures, and coma. Children with these symptoms require immediate hospitalization and treatment. However, blood lead levels in this range are now extremely uncommon. The vast majority of children with lead poisoning will not have any obvious signs or symptoms.

Should I test my child's other toys for lead?

You may have heard about home test kits, which are sold for use in the home to detect lead in paint, soil, and dust (and, in some cases, water, dishware, glasses, and ceramics). A chemical reaction occurs when chemicals in the kit are exposed to lead, causing a color change. The State Department of Health and the Federal Environmental Protection Agency do not recommend home test kits to detect lead in toys, paint, dust, or soil. Studies show that these kits are not reliable enough to tell the difference between high and low levels of lead. At this time, the kits are not recommended for testing performed by either homeowners or certified lead-based paint professionals.

Where can I find out more information?

Ask your health care provider or call your local health department for more information on childhood lead poisoning prevention. The state Department of Health Web site has information about lead poisoning and a link to recent recalls. You can access this site at: www.health.state.ny.us/environmental/lead/index.htm.