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CDC now uses a blood lead reference value of 5 micrograms per deciliter to identify children with blood lead levels that are much higher than most children's levels. This new level is based on the U.S. population of children ages 1-5 years who are in the highest 2.5% of children when tested for lead in their blood.

This reference value is based on the 97.5th percentile of the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES)'s blood lead distribution in children.

This document was archived for historical purposes on July 30, 2020.

LEAD POISONING

Words to Know from

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Introduction

Lead Poisoning: Words to Know from A to Z is a dictionary that gives the meaning of words you often hear or read about lead.

Some of the words in A to Z have everyday meanings you might already know. In this dictionary, we give the meaning of the word as it relates to lead poisoning.

Many of the words in this dictionary are used by doctors, nurses, and lead inspectors when they talk about lead poisoning. In the Key Words section, you will find words that are often used together. For example, you will see medical words about lead poisoning that you might hear at a health center.

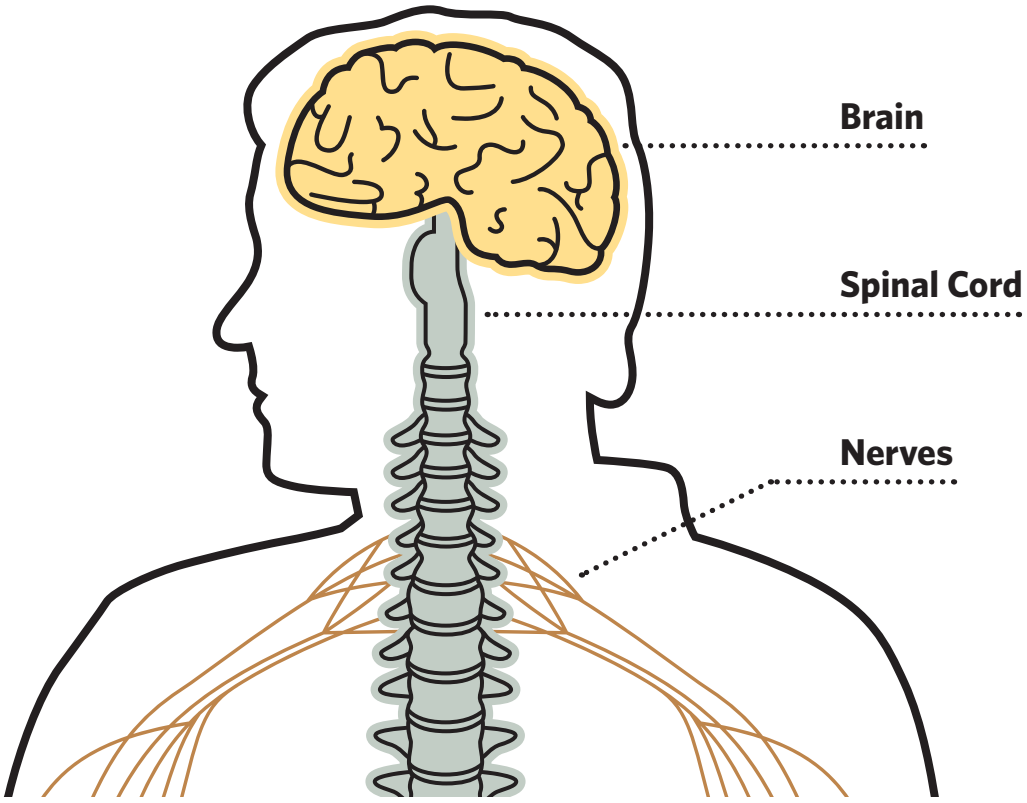
The words with their meanings are listed from A to Z. We show you how to say each word and use it in a sentence.

Learn about Lead Poisoning

Swallowing or breathing in lead causes lead poisoning. Lead harms children between the ages of 0 and 6 years old. If you are pregnant, lead may also harm your baby.

Lead hurts the brain and other parts of the nervous system. Some of the health problems caused by lead poisoning may never go away. Lead in a child's body can:

- Slow down growth and development
- Damage hearing and speech
- Cause behavior problems
- Make it hard to pay attention and learn



Nervous System

How do children get lead poisoning?

Most children get lead poisoning from living or staying in older homes that have lead paint. Many homes built before 1978 have lead paint on the inside and outside of the building.

When old paint cracks and peels, it makes lead dust. Children get lead poisoning from swallowing dust on their hands and toys. Children can also breathe in lead dust.

Lead is also found in:

- Soil and tap water
- Toys and toy jewelry
- Pots or containers, candy, and folk medicine made in other countries
- Work places where auto repair, construction, and plumbing are done

Most children get lead poisoning from lead dust on their hands and toys.

How do I know if my child has lead poisoning?

A lead test is the only way to know if your child has lead poisoning.

In a lead test, a blood sample is taken from your child's finger or arm. The test measures how much lead is in the blood.

Most children who have lead poisoning do not look or act sick.

Protect Your Child from Lead

Here are steps you can take to protect your child from lead:

1. Test your home for lead.

- The most important step is to find and remove or cover the lead in your home as soon as possible.

2. Keep children away from lead paint.

- Use contact paper or duct tape to cover loose paint around windows and walls, or put furniture in front of peeling paint.
- Wash hands and toys with soap and water.
- Use a wet paper towel or sponge to wipe up lead dust around windows and floors.

3. Give your child healthy foods.

- Look for foods with calcium, iron, and vitamin C. These foods can help keep lead out of the body.
- Feed your child healthy snacks like fresh fruit, cheese, and whole-wheat crackers.

4. Renovate safely.

- Keep children and pregnant women away from the work area.
- If you are hiring workers, make sure they have been trained in lead-safe work practices.
- If you are doing the work yourself, take a training course in lead-safe work practices.

Get Support

Dealing with lead poisoning can be stressful. You may be worried about your child's health.

Here are some tips to help you cope:

Make a plan with your doctor and/or social worker.

You can work together to find the best treatment for your child. Be sure to ask questions if you don't understand something.

Get informed.

Sometimes a doctor or nurse is the best source of information. Or you can contact the Lead Poisoning Prevention Program in your area. You may want to talk to other parents who have children with lead poisoning.

Share how you are feeling with your family and friends.

Remember to ask for help and support.

Key Words

These words are often used together. Look up their meanings in the list of words from A to Z.

Words about how lead gets into the body

Absorb
Concentration
Exposure
Ingest
Inhale

Words about testing your child for lead

Blood Lead Level
Blood Lead Test
Blood Sample
Capillary Sample
Elevated Blood Lead Level
Lead Poisoning
Level of Concern
Micrograms per Deciliter
Pb
Pediatrician
Risk
Risk Factor
Screening
Venous Sample

Words at the doctor

Anemia
Chronic
Lead Poisoning
Pediatrician
Pica
Prenatal
Risk
Symptom
Treatment
Trimester

Words about how lead affects the body

Behavior Problems
Chronic
Coma
Development
Learning Disability
Nervous System
Seizure
Symptom

Words about caring for a child with lead poisoning

Case Management
Chelation
Compliance
Developmental Assessment
Monitor
Treatment

Words about eating healthy

Calcium
Iron
Nutrition
Supplement
Vitamin C

Words about testing your home for lead

Assessment
Chipping Paint
Contaminated
Deteriorated
Hazard
Inspection
Inspector
Peeling Paint
Risk Assessment

Words about parts of your house

Exterior
Frame
Friction
Interior
Property
Surface
Window Sill

Words for fixing the lead in your home

Abatement
Compliance
Contact Paper
Deleading
Duct Tape
Eliminate
Encapsulant
Encapsulation
Interim Control
Remediation
Respirator
Wet Scrape

Words about cleaning

HEPA Filter
Lead Dust
Prevention
Reduce
Wet Mop or Wet Wipe

Lead Poisoning: Words to Know from A to Z

Abatement (ah BAYT ment)

Work done to remove or cover lead paint in your home. Abatement includes replacing windows and encapsulation. It is permanent or meant to last a long time. Abatement is sometimes called deleading.

Example: Robert hired a contractor with a special license to do lead **abatement** in his home.

Absorb (ab ZORB)

To take in or soak up like a paper towel.

Example: Children's bodies **absorb** more lead than adults'.

Anemia (ah NEE mee uh)

Having less than the normal amount of red blood cells in your blood. Anemia can make you tired and short of breath. It can also make it easier for you to get lead poisoning.

Example: Marcos has **anemia**. His mother gives him foods with iron and vitamin C to help make his body stronger.

Assessment (ah SES ment)

A test or check.

Example: They did an **assessment** of the home to make sure it was safe.

B

Behavior Problems (bee HAYV yoor • PROB lums)

Acting angry or having trouble paying attention and sitting still. Lead poisoning can cause behavior problems.

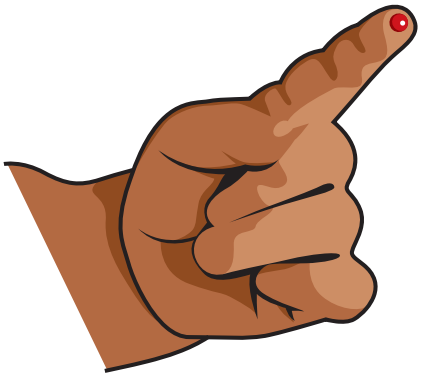
Example: The social worker told Mrs. Brown to watch her son for **behavior problems** in school and at home.

Blood Lead Level (blud • led • LEV el)

How much lead is in the body.

Example: The nurse told Christine that her daughter's **blood lead level** was 12.

Blood Lead Test (blud • led • test)



A test to find out how much lead is in the body. A small amount of blood is taken from the finger or arm. A blood lead test is the only way to know if your child has lead poisoning.

Example: Maria called the clinic to schedule a **blood lead test** for her 2-year-old son.

Blood Sample (blud • SAM pul)

A small amount of blood taken from the finger or arm to be tested.

Example: The doctor sent Jamal's **blood sample** to the lab.

Capillary Sample (KAP il air ee • SAM pul)

A small amount of blood taken from the finger to test for lead. Sometimes called a "finger stick."

Example: David didn't cry when the nurse took a **capillary sample** from his finger.

Calcium (KAL see um)

A nutrient that makes your bones and teeth strong. Calcium is in foods such as milk, cheese, yogurt, and dark green vegetables like spinach and broccoli.

Example: Eating foods with **calcium** can help protect the body from lead poisoning.

Case Management (kays • MAN ej ment)

Helping families of children with high lead levels. Case management is done by a nurse or social worker. It may include helping you get your home inspected for lead or going back to the doctor for another blood lead test.

Example: The social worker in charge of **case management** gave Mrs. Torres a list of healthy foods to protect her son from lead poisoning.

Ceramics (sir RAM iks)

Pots and dishes made out of clay.

Example: Anna can't use the **ceramic** pot for cooking because it has lead in it.

C

Chelation (kee LAY shun)

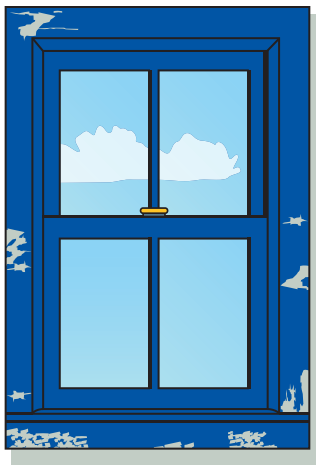
A medical treatment used to remove lead from the body when blood lead levels are very high.

Example: Sonia stayed in the hospital overnight to get **chelation** therapy because her blood lead level was so high.

Chipping Paint (CHIP ing • paynt)

Paint from the inside or outside of your house that is coming off in pieces. Sometimes you will find pieces of paint on the ground.

Example: Janet told her landlord about the **chipping paint** around the window.



Chronic (KRAH nik)

Lasting a long time. Does not go away.

Example: Lead poisoning is a **chronic** health problem.

Coma (KOH ma)

A sleep caused by illness or injury, sometimes lasting a long time. A person in a coma cannot move or talk.

Example: Stacia was in a **coma** for two weeks after she swallowed toy jewelry made with lead.

Compliance (kum PLY ens)

Following a medical plan or doctor's instructions. Following the law.

Example: In order to be in **compliance** with the law, the landlord had to replace the windows.

Concentration (kahn sen TRAY shun)

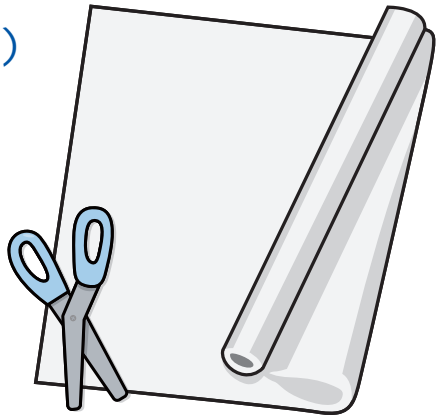
Amount or level of.

Example: Maya has a high **concentration** of lead in her body.

Contact Paper (KAHN takt • PAY pur)

Plastic paper that is sticky on one side. It is often used to line drawers and shelves.

Example: John put **contact paper** on the window sills to cover the chipping paint.



Contaminated (kahn TAM in nay ted)

Polluted. Not safe.

Example: The soil around the house was **contaminated** with lead.

Cosmetics (kahz MET iks)

Makeup or beauty products like lipstick, eye shadow, or mascara.

Example: Some **cosmetics** made in other countries have lead in them.

Dangerous (DAYN jur us)

Harmful. Not safe.

Example: Scraping old paint can be very **dangerous** because it makes a lot of lead dust.

Deleading (dee LED ing)

Work done to remove or cover lead paint. Deleading includes replacing windows and encapsulation. It is permanent, or meant to last a long time. Deleading is sometimes called abatement.

Example: It's dangerous for children to be in the house while the workers are **deleading**.

Deteriorated (dee TEE ree oh ray ted)

Gotten worse.

Example: The paint on the porch has **deteriorated** over the years.

Development (deh VEL up ment)

Growth or progress.

Example: Lead poisoning can affect a child's **development** and cause problems with learning and behavior.

Developmental Assessment

(deh VEL up MENT al • ah SES ment)

A test that a doctor or nurse usually does to check how well your child talks, hears, learns, and moves.

Example: The nurse gave the girl blocks to play with during her **developmental assessment**.

Discrimination (dis CRIM eh nay shun)

Not being treated fairly, usually because of your race, sex, age, or income.

Example: It is **discrimination** for landlords to refuse to rent to families with children.

Dry Scraping or **Dry Sanding**

(dry • SKRAYP ing) or (dry • SAND ing)

Using a metal tool to scrape off or sand old, dry paint. This creates a lot of lead dust.

Example: **Dry scraping** old paint can create dangerous lead dust.

Duct Tape (duk • tayp)

Wide tape that is very strong and usually silver.

Example: Adam used thick sheets of plastic and **duct tape** to close off the work area from the rest of the house.

Elevated Blood Lead Level (EBLL)

(ella VAY ted • blud • led • LEV el)

A blood lead level of 10 or higher. Elevated means high or raised. Elevated blood lead level is sometimes written as EBLL.

Example: The doctor told Irene that her son had an **elevated blood lead level**.

Eliminate (ee LIM in ayt)

Get rid of.

Example: The inspector told Ali he must **eliminate** the lead hazards in his house.

Environment (en VY urn ment)

Everything that is around you, including the air, plants, animals, dust, and buildings. The environment can be inside or outside.

Example: Lead and other chemicals in the **environment** were making Carla sick.

Encapsulant (en CAP sul ant)

A thick liquid used to cover lead paint. Paint is not an encapsulant.

Example: Larry used **encapsulant** on the baseboards to keep the old paint from chipping.

Encapsulation (en CAP sul ay shun)

Using encapsulant to cover lead paint.

Example: Deanna hired a professional to do the **encapsulation** in her house.

Exposure (ex SPOH shur)

To come into contact with by touching, eating, or breathing. To put in danger by not protecting.

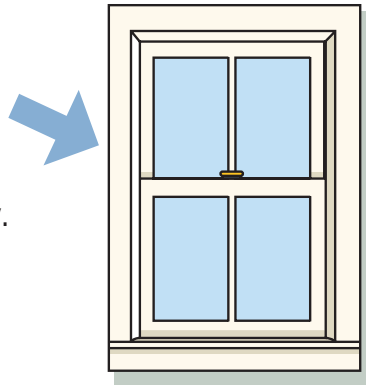
Example: **Exposure** to lead dust can make children sick.

Exterior (ex TEER ee ur)

Outside.

Example: The **exterior** of the house was painted brown.

Frame (fraym)



The rim or border around a door or window.

Example: The contractor replaced every window **frame** in the house.

Friction (frik SHUN)

Rubbing two things or parts together.

Example: The **friction** of the door against the frame caused the paint to chip.

Folk Medicine (fohk • MED i sin)

Plants or things found in nature used to cure illness. Folk medicine often comes from other countries or cultures. It does not come from a medical doctor. It is sometimes called traditional medicine or a home remedy.

Example: Mary asked her doctor if the **folk medicines** she learned from her grandmother might have lead in them.

Glaze (glayz)

A clear shiny coating on pottery or ceramics.

Example: The **glaze** on the beanpot may have lead in it.

Hazard (has ZURD)

A danger or risk.

Example: Old paint that is chipping or peeling is a lead **hazard**.

HEPA Filter (HEP ah • FIL tur)

A special filter for your vacuum that can remove lead and other dust from the air.

Example: Always use a vacuum with a **HEPA filter** to clean up the work area. A regular vacuum will spread lead dust into the air.

Home Remedy (hohm • REM i dee)

Plants or things found in nature used to cure illness. A home remedy often comes from other countries or cultures. It does not come from a medical doctor. It is sometimes called folk medicine or traditional medicine.

Example: Mary took a **home remedy** for her stomachache that she learned from her grandmother.

Imported (im POHR ted)

Brought from another country.

Example: Some candy and toys **imported** from other countries have lead in them.

Ingest (in JEST)

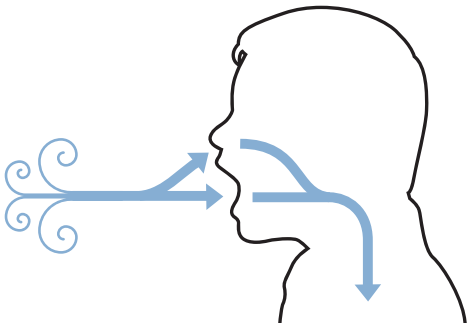
To swallow or take in through your mouth.

Example: Children can **ingest** lead dust when they put their hands or toys in their mouths.

Inhale (in HAYL)

To breathe in.

Example: Use a respirator when you scrape or sand old paint so you don't **inhale** lead dust.



Inspection (in SPEK shun)

An official test or check of your home. The inspector will test the paint inside and outside your home for lead.

Example: A complete **inspection** of your home can take 3 or 4 hours.

Inspector (in SPEK tor)

A person who is trained to test your home for lead.

Example: Before Sam started to remodel his home, he had it tested by a licensed lead **inspector**.

Interim Control (IN tur im • KAHN trohl)

Fixing the most dangerous lead hazards in your home. Interim control is only for a short time. It is not the same thing as abatement.

Example: The family decided to use **interim control** while they waited for abatement of the house.

Interior (in TEER ee ur)

Inside.

Example: The **interior** of the house was painted recently.

Iron (EYE urn)

A nutrient that can help protect the body from lead. Iron is in foods like meats, fish, beans, cereals, and peanut butter.

Example: When you are at the grocery store, look for cereal with extra **iron** in it.

Landlord (LAND lohrd)

Someone who owns a house or apartment and rents it to other people.

Example: If you rent your home, ask your **landlord** to test your apartment for lead.

L

Lead (led)

A metal that hurts the body. Lead can be in paint, dishes, pottery, toys (including jewelry), candy, and folk medicine. It can also be found in many work places, like auto repair, construction, and plumbing.

Example: **Lead** poisons children when it gets into their bodies.

Lead Dust (led • duhst)

Tiny bits of lead that are too small to see. When old paint peels and cracks, it makes lead dust. Home repair projects can also make lead dust. If children breathe in or swallow lead dust, they can get very sick.

Example: **Lead dust** gets on children's hands and toys.

Lead Paint (led • paynt)

Paint that has lead in it. Companies are no longer allowed to put lead in paint.

Example: Many homes built before 1978 have **lead paint** on the inside and outside.

Lead Poisoning (led • POY zen ing)

A sickness caused by swallowing or breathing lead. Lead poisons children when it gets into their bodies. Lead poisoning can hurt the brain and nervous system and slow down growth and development.

Example: A blood lead test is the only way to know if your child has **lead poisoning**.

Learning Disability (LURN ing • dis uh BIL ah tee)

Problems understanding what is said to you or what you read. Learning disabilities make it hard to read, write, speak, pay attention, or sit still in school.

Example: Mixing up letters and numbers can be a sign of a **learning disability**.

Level of Concern (LEV el • uv • KAHN surn)

A blood lead level of 10 or higher. Also called an Elevated Blood Lead Level.

Example: The nurse told Paula that her son's blood lead level was above the **level of concern**. He will need to come back for another test.

Micrograms per deciliter (µg/dl)

(MY kroh grams • pur • DES i lee tur)

Unit (like an ounce) for measuring lead in the blood.

Example: Matu's blood lead level was 14 **micrograms per deciliter** (or 14 µg/dl).

Monitor (MAHN i tur)

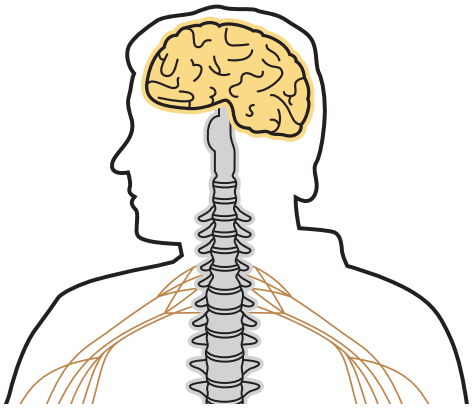
To keep track of or watch for changes.

Example: The doctor will **monitor** Brian's blood lead level to see if it goes down.

Nervous System (NUR vus • SIS tem)

A person's brain, spinal cord, and nerves. Your nervous system controls your thinking, feeling, smelling, touching, seeing, hearing, and moving.

Example: The **nervous system** is the control center for the entire body.



Nutrition (NOO tri shun)

Food. Healthy eating.

Example: Good **nutrition** includes eating foods with calcium, iron, and vitamin C.

Occupant (AH kyoo pent)

A person who lives in a building.

Example: There are 20 **occupants** in the apartment building.

Occupation (ah kyoo PAY shun)

Job.

Example: His **occupation** is construction worker.

Pb (pee bee)

Letters that stand for lead. A short way of writing the word lead.

Example: His lead (**Pb**) level is higher than 10.

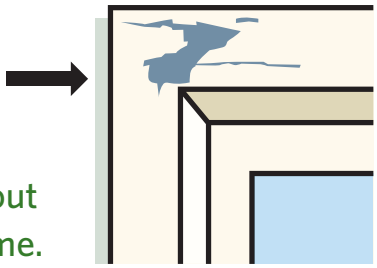
Pediatrician (pee dee ah TRI shun)

A doctor who takes care of children.

Example: She took her son to the **pediatrician** for a lead test.

Peeling Paint (PEEL ing • paynt)

Old paint that is starting to come off of a wall, ceiling, or other surface.



Example: Mrs. Sanchez called her landlord about the **peeling paint** on the window frame.

Pica (PY kah)

Eating things that are not food, like dirt, clay, or paint chips.

Example: **Pica** can be dangerous for children because they may swallow lead.

Poison (POY zen)

Something that can harm or kill a person if it is swallowed or breathed in.

Example: Lead dust from chipping paint can **poison** young children.

Prenatal (pree NAY tul)

Before a child is born.

Example: It is important for pregnant women to go to the doctor for **prenatal** care.

Prevention (pree VEN shun)

To stop something before it happens.

Example: The nurse worked for the Lead Poisoning **Prevention** Program.

Property (PROP ur tee)

Land owned by a person.

Example: The inspector checked the whole **property**, including the backyard, for lead paint.

Recall (REE cahl)

To have toys or other things returned to the factory where they were made, usually because they are dangerous.

Example: The company announced a **recall** of the toy because it was made with lead paint.

Reduce (ree DOOS)

To make less or lower.

Example: Washing children's hands and toys can **reduce** the risk of lead poisoning.

Remediation (reh mee dee AY shun)

Fixing or getting rid of a lead hazard. Correcting a problem.

Example: Some cities give out loans for the **remediation** of lead paint.

Renovate (REHN oh vayt)

To remodel or repair.

Example: We are planning to test for lead paint before we **renovate** the new baby's room.

Respirator (RES pur ay tur)

A face mask with a special air filter that will keep you from breathing in dangerous lead dust and other chemicals.

Example: The construction worker wore a **respirator** to protect himself from lead poisoning.

Risk (rihsk)

A chance of getting hurt or sick.

Example: Saida took extra steps to lower her daughter's **risk** of lead poisoning.

Risk Assessment (rihsk • ah SES ment)

An inspection or test of your home for lead hazards.

Example: The inspector found many lead hazards during the **risk assessment**.

Risk Factor (rihsk • FAK tur)

Something that increases your chances of getting hurt or sick.

Example: Living in an old house is a **risk factor** for lead poisoning.

Screening (SKREEN ing)

A medical test to find out if a person has a disease or illness.

Example: A blood lead **screening** is the only way to know if your child has lead poisoning.

Seizure (SEE shur)

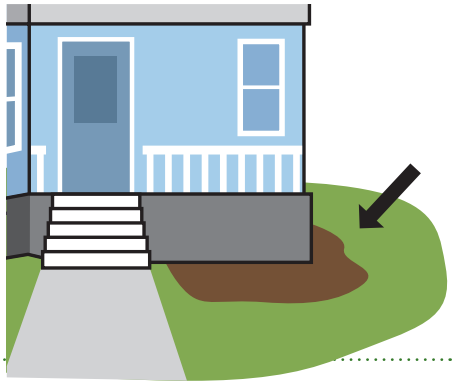
A sudden attack in the brain that can cause a person to lose control of their body.

Example: Her **seizures** were caused by lead poisoning.

Soil (soyl)

Dirt.

Example: They tested the **soil** around the house for lead.



Solder (SAH dur)

Metal that is melted and used to connect other pieces of metal together. Some solder is made from lead.

Example: The plumber used **solder** to connect the two pipes.

Source (sohrs)

The cause of something. The place where something started.

Example: Lead dust from peeling paint was the **source** of the child's lead poisoning.

Surface (SUR fis)

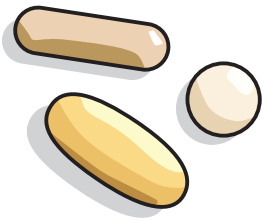
The outside or top of something. Part of a house that may have lead, like a wall, window sill, stair, or porch.

Example: The inspector tested every **surface** in the home for lead paint.

Supplement (SUP leh ment)

A vitamin or pill that has important nutrients.

Example: If you eat healthy meals, you may not need to take a **supplement**.



Symptom (SIMP tum)

A sign of illness, such as a headache or a fever.

Example: Linda did not show any **symptoms** of being sick. Her father was surprised when the doctor said Linda had lead poisoning.

Tap Water (tap • WAH tur)

Water that comes from the sink.

Example: Ms. Coleman asked her landlord to test the **tap water** for lead.

Tenant (TEN ent)

A person who rents a house or apartment.

Example: The **tenant** in apartment 403 has a new baby.

Traditional Medicine (trah DISH un al • MED i sin)

Plants or things found in nature used to cure illness. Traditional medicine often comes from other countries or cultures. It does not come from a medical doctor. It is sometimes called folk medicine or a home remedy.

Example: Mary's grandmother still takes **traditional medicine** when she has a stomachache.

Treatment (TREET ment)

Things you do to fight or cure a disease.

Example: Part of the **treatment** for lead poisoning is to fix lead hazards and eat healthy food.

Trimester (TRY mes tur)

A period of three months. Pregnancy is divided into three trimesters.

Example: She felt better after her first **trimester** of pregnancy.

Venous Sample (VEE nus • SAM pul)

A small amount of blood taken from the arm to test for lead.

Example: Michael had a **venous sample** taken for his blood lead test.

Vitamin C (VY tuh mihn • see)

An important vitamin that helps the body grow and repair itself. Oranges, tomatoes, green and red peppers, sweet potatoes, greens, and fruit and vegetable juices have lots of vitamin C.

Example: Orange juice is a good source of **vitamin C**.

Wet Mop or **Wet Wipe**

(weht • mahp) or (weht • wipe)

Using a wet paper towel or wet cloth to clean up dust from the floor and windows.

Example: Using a broom or vacuum will spread lead dust into the air. Instead, **wet wipe** around windows and play areas.

Wet Scrape (weht • skrayp)

Using a spray bottle filled with water to wet painted areas before you sand or scrape.

Example: **Wet scrape** old paint so that you don't create a lot of dangerous dust. Never use electric sanders or heat guns.

Window Sill (WIN doh • sil)

The flat ledge at the bottom of a window.

Example: She used a wet paper towel to wet wipe the dust and paint chips from the **window sill**.

Notes

FOR MORE INFORMATION VISIT

www.cdc.gov/nceh/lead

1-800-CDC-INFO
1-800-232-4636