

ADULT EXPOSURE TO LEAD

FACT SHEET

Where can adults be exposed to lead?

More than 80 percent of exposure to lead among adults is from work. The most common work exposures in Michigan are removal of lead paint, manufacture of brass and bronze fixtures, recycling of lead batteries, and as an instructor or doing maintenance in a firing range.

Adults can also be exposed to lead in tap water from water pipes, and renovation of homes built before 1978 with paint containing lead. The lead found in tap water in homes around Michigan would be from pipes installed before 1986.

Should adults be concerned about exposure to lead?

Adults are at less risk of developing health effects from lead taken by mouth than children. Adult bodies tend to absorb less lead than children's bodies (smaller amounts of lead that is swallowed end up in adult's blood than would end up in children's blood). Adult's bodies remove almost all of the lead that is swallowed, while children's bodies only remove about a third of the lead amount they swallow.

However, health effects could still occur in adults who have had years of exposure. Exposure to lead can contribute to adult health effects such as:

- Essential tremor of their hands¹
- Small increases in blood pressure, especially in middle-aged or older people^{1,2}
- Decreased kidney function¹
- Changes in sperm and possible difficulty becoming pregnant¹

People exposed to higher levels of lead, like those measured during occupational exposures, could have other health effects, such as muscle weakness, irritability, difficulty sleeping, inability to concentrate, nerve damage in hands and feet, and anemia².

People with health effects should speak to their medical providers. Many of the listed health effects can be caused by things other than lead. If they are from lead, they would more likely be associated with exposure to lead over many years that occurred when the adult was younger.

Should adults get tested for lead?

People concerned about their exposure should speak with their healthcare provider about blood lead testing. If you don't have a primary care doctor, visit the Genesee County Health Department, South McCree Building at 630 S. Saginaw St. Suite 4 in Flint for blood testing and to be enrolled in health insurance.

What is lead?

- Lead is a heavy metal. The largest use for lead is in storage batteries in cars and other vehicles.
- Brass and bronze used in plumbing faucets may be about 10 percent lead. Lead is commonly used to make bullets.
- Historically, lead compounds were widely used as a pigment in paints, dyes, and ceramic glazes and in caulk, pipes and solder.

References

1. National Toxicology Program (NTP). 2012. NTP monograph on health effects of low-level lead. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Health Assessment and Translation
2. Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR). 2007. Toxicological profile for Lead. Atlanta, GA: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Public Health Service.