

Tips to protect children from lead poisoning

Recent toy recalls have brought attention to the issue of lead in toys. Unfortunately, significant quantities of lead can still be found in many ordinary products that parents buy for their children. Lead is very harmful to children. October 18-24, 2009 is National Lead Poisoning Prevention Week and a great time to remind parents and caregivers to make sure that any products children use or play with including toys, children's jewellery, cribs, lunch boxes, crayons, chalk, and backpacks, are free of lead.

Lead is a metal used in making paint, plastic and vinyl. It is very dangerous to young children as small amounts of lead can build up in their blood and cause lifelong learning, developmental and behavioural problems.

Lead poisoning, which occurs when lead builds up in the body, is the most common environmental illness children and is completely preventable. Children under six years of age are at the greatest risk of lead poisoning because their brains and nervous systems are still forming.

Check the database

To help consumers find out if products they have at home or are considering buying might have lead, The Ecology Centre, a Michigan-based non-profit, has collected test data on nearly 5000 products. This is the largest such database nationally and it can be here www.healthystuff.org to look up detailed information for over 5000 products.

Parents or caregivers can take the following steps to protect children from lead:

- Check all baby and child products at home, relative's homes, day-care, or at the babysitter's.
- Check hand-me-downs and gifts. Products that have lead may be on store shelves, at second-hand shops, garage sales or swap meets.
- Choose toys made from wood or cloth that do not have paint, varnish, or metal.
- Throw away toys that are damaged, have cracked or peeling paint, or bite marks through your neighbourhood's hazardous waste program.
- Don't let young children wear jewellery. It is dangerous if swallowed or put into the mouth and may contain lead.
- Wipe toys with a damp cloth every few days to clean off dust.
- Wash children's hands with soap and water often and especially before eating and sleeping.
- Make sure children get tested for lead at one year old and again at two years old.

The only way to determine if your child is suffering from lead poisoning is to take a blood lead test. Most children who have lead poisoning do not look or act sick. Symptoms, if present, may be confused with common childhood complaints, such as stomach pains, fussiness, headaches or loss of appetite.

Source: Public Health Trust

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