

# LEAD FACTS: Adult Blood Lead Testing

## What is Lead?

Lead is a common metal that is sometimes found where we live, work or play. It can be taken into the body by breathing lead dust or getting lead inside your mouth. This is called lead exposure. If you get too much lead in your body, it can be poisonous and cause serious health problems. Exposures to lead should be reduced or avoided.

## What is a blood lead test?

Your exposure to lead can be measured with a blood test. This test measures the amount of lead in your bloodstream. The results are called a Blood Lead Level or "BLL." Your test results may look like this: 9 µg/dL. This number shows how much lead is in your blood. In this case, there would be 9 micrograms of lead in one deciliter of blood.

Your test result is: \_\_\_\_\_ µg/dL.

Date of test: \_\_\_\_\_.

Most experts agree that an adult Blood Lead Level (BLL) of 5 µg/dL or more is of concern. If your BLL is more than 5 µg/dL, you may feel okay or you may feel sick. Even if you do not feel sick, lead may still be hurting your body. The risk of having damage to your health increases with the amount of lead in your blood and the length of time you have been exposed. It also will depend on whether you have any health conditions that place you at higher risk of damage from lead.

**Keep your blood lead level below 5 µg/dL!**

## How does lead affect your health?

Some of the health effects that you might suffer from lead exposure include:

- higher blood pressure
- harm to an unborn baby
- reproductive problems
- muscle and joint pain
- headaches
- tiredness
- slower reflexes
- kidney damage

Other health effects could include:

- stomach pain
- anemia
- memory problems
- constipation
- sleep problems
- brain damage

Extreme cases may cause convulsions, coma or death.

## Can your lead exposure affect others?

**Yes!** Lead dust can be brought home on work clothes and shoes. It can harm anyone exposed to it, **especially children.\*** Because their bodies are growing, the health effects for children are more serious than those for adults. Children can be poisoned at much lower levels than adults. If you work with lead and have young children in your home, talk with your doctor about having them tested.

If you need help, call your local health department or the Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Program at **919-707-5854**.

\*If you or someone in your home is pregnant, talk with your doctor. There may be special health concerns.

## Don't panic if your blood lead level is high, but follow your doctor's advice!

Your blood lead level can be lowered. Your body will get rid of lead naturally once you are removed from the source of lead exposure. This may be all that is needed for lower lead levels and short exposures. If your lead level is high, you may need treatment. Your doctor will help you decide what is best for you. You will need to visit your doctor until the condition is no longer a problem to your health.

# 919-707-5900

**Occupational Health Surveillance Program  
NC Department of Health and Human Services**

Division of Public Health  
Occupational and Environmental Epidemiology Branch  
1912 Mail Service Center • Raleigh, NC 27699-1912  
Information about preventing lead exposure is on the back >>>



State of North Carolina  
Department of Health and Human Services  
Division of Public Health

[www.ncdhhs.gov](http://www.ncdhhs.gov)

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# LEAD FACTS: Preventing Lead Exposure

## What can you do?

First learn the source of your lead exposure. Was it from work, a hobby, another activity or a combination of these? Once you know the source of your exposure, you can take steps to prevent or reduce further exposure. Remember to always eat a well-balanced diet. Good nutrition can help lessen the amount of lead taken in by your body.

## Where can lead be found?

One of the most common sources of lead exposure for adults is in the workplace. It is important to know if you work with lead so that you can protect yourself. Some industries that might use lead include:

- makers of batteries, glass, brass valves and plastics coloring
- radiator service
- auto repair
- sandblasting and painting work
- lead paint removal work
- salvage work

Activities or hobbies may also cause lead exposure like:

- casting sinkers or lead parts
- biting fishing sinkers
- making ceramics, stained glass or jewelry
- reloading ammunition
- target shooting at indoor firing ranges
- drinking moonshine
- soldering or plumbing
- using traditional remedies
- using lead-contaminated consumer products

## What precautions can you take?

### Do you need help?

If you work with lead or think you might, talk with the safety officer, nurse or industrial hygienist at work. He or she can check your work area for lead dust or fumes and help you avoid exposure. If you need information, call the Occupational Health Surveillance Program at **919-707-5900**.

The North Carolina Department of Labor's Occupational Safety and Health Division has rules that employers must follow when workers are exposed to lead. To find out about these rules or if you are concerned about your exposure to lead at work, call the state office at **1-800-625-2267**.

Always follow workplace rules to prevent lead exposure. Below is a list of common rules for workplaces that use lead. Put a check beside things that you do.

- **Change** into work clothes and shoes before working with lead. Store your street clothes and shoes in a clean place.
- **Wash** your hands and face before eating and drinking or smoking.
- **Eat, drink and smoke** only in areas free of lead dust and fumes.
- **Wear** a clean respirator in all work areas that have over exposures to lead dust or fumes. Make sure that it is the right one for the work you do and that it fits as it should. You need special training and a medical exam to use a respirator.
- **Use** proper wet clean-up methods in your work area or use a special High Efficiency Particulate Air (HEPA) vacuum.
- **Shower** at the end of the work day, at work if you can, before going home.
- **After showering**, no clothing or equipment worn while at work should be worn home and this includes shoes, underwear and socks.
- **Launder** your work clothes at work if you can. If you must take them home, put them in a plastic bag. Wash and dry them separately from the household laundry.



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