

## Lead Paint at Home

### Attention homeowners

Are you thinking of renovating your home? Older homes may contain lead-based paint. Removing paint as part of a renovation project may expose you and your family to lead. Therefore, before you begin renovations, there are some things you should know about removing paint.

### Health hazards of lead exposure

Lead is hazardous to health. At higher and extended levels of exposure, lead can cause anemia, impair brain and nervous system functions, and affect learning abilities.

Lead exposure has dropped dramatically in the last 30 years. In recent years, reduction of the lead content in paint, gasoline and food, has lowered children's exposure to lead. However, recent data shows harmful effects of lead exposure among toddlers at levels previously considered harmless. Children are more susceptible to the health hazards of lead, and prolonged exposure to even small amounts of lead may have an impact on their health.

Toddlers and pre-school children are especially at risk, resulting from their habit of putting things in their mouths and their ability to absorb lead more easily than adults.

Today, children have less exposure to lead than their parents did in the past. Lead is a natural element and everyone is exposed to some extent. For children or adults, exposure to lead occurs most often from their diets and eating habits. In addition, a potential source of exposure is lead-based paint. Most incidents of lead exposure are preventable.

### Does my home contain lead-based paint?

Whether your home contains lead-based paint or not depends on when it was built. Before 1950, most paints contained large amounts of lead. In fact, some paints made in the 1940's contained up to 50 per cent

lead by dry weight. Homes built before 1960 were most likely painted inside and outside with lead-based paint.

Since the 1950's, the use of lead has been more common in exterior paint than interior paint. Exterior paint that contains lead will have a warning label; this paint should not be used to paint the inside of a building. If you are renovating, check the label and make sure that the paint you buy is for interior use only.

Between 1950 and 1976, the use of lead in paints decreased significantly. In 1973, the *Hazardous Products Act* limited the amount of lead in interior paint used in areas accessible to children. Paint containing more than 0.5% lead must be labeled to indicate that it's not safe to use in areas accessible to children. It is unlikely that owners of homes built after 1980 need to worry about lead levels in interior paints.

### Testing your home

If your home is built before the 1950s, check painted surfaces for lead using a home lead test kit or by sending a sample to a certified laboratory. Contact your local health unit for more information.

### Should lead-based paint be removed?

Lead-based paint doesn't present a health hazard if the paint is not chipping, flaking, crushed or sanded into dust, or able to be chewed by young children - for example, on window sills, older painted cribs and toys. In fact, removing old paint can sometimes result in a more immediate health hazard than leaving the painted area intact.

To reduce the chance of exposure to leaded paint, surfaces that are still in good condition can be covered with non-leaded paint, vinyl wallpaper, wallboard or paneling.

It is possible to complete renovations without contaminating the rest of the house. Follow the safety rules outlined below when removing lead-based paint from walls, ceilings or structures, or when producing dust that may contain lead – for example, when sanding for surface preparation or knocking down a wall. These steps will help protect you and your family during renovations. Depending on the complexity of the work involved, it might be a good idea to hire a trained professional.

## **Safety rules for removing lead-based paint**

### **Protect Your Family:**

Women who are pregnant or trying to become pregnant should try to avoid exposure to lead. If your home is going to be significantly contaminated with lead dust during renovations, you should consider moving pre-school children and pregnant women elsewhere until the work is done.

### **Protect Yourself:**

Wear appropriate protective clothing such as coveralls, goggles, gloves, and most importantly, a NIOSH (U.S. National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health) approved respirator for dust, mist, and fumes to reduce the possible intake of lead dust. Consult your local safety equipment dealer. Don't eat, drink, or smoke in an area where paint is being removed.

### **Prepare the Area:**

Remove drapes, rugs, and furniture from the area. Cover the objects that can't be moved, including the floor, with heavy plastic. Seal heating vents used for both supply and return. Protect the entrance to the working area with plastic to contain dust. Use a water spray with a small amount of detergent to wet all surfaces and to contain any dust during renovations or cleanup. If working outdoors, use drop sheets to catch any paint scrapings, and don't work on windy days.

Make sure children and pets are not in the area. Cover windows and doors with plastic to keep scrapings and dust out of the house.

### **Use Safe Stripping Techniques:**

Use techniques that don't disperse lead dust or fumes. Chemical stripping produces the least amount of lead dust. As chemical stripping agents also contain potentially harmful substances, they must be used with care. Mechanical removal through sanding or grinding produces more lead dust.

### **Don't Spread the Dust Around:**

Remove protective clothing and footwear whenever you leave the work area. Wash work clothes separately from other laundry, or discard them when you're finished.

### **Do a Daily Cleanup:**

At the end of each day, wetting the dust and wet-wiping will help cleanup and prevent the dispersion of dust. Put all waste in a secure container or sealed plastic bag. Wash your hands and face once your work is done and before entering a clean area.

### **Do a Final Cleanup:**

Wait at least one day after completing work to let any dust settle, then do a final cleanup. Wet wipe all surfaces, and dispose of any plastic enclosures to avoid generating dust. Place in a sealed plastic bag.

For more information on lead-based paint, visit Health Canada's Web site at [http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/iyh-vsv/prod/paint-peinture\\_e.html](http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/iyh-vsv/prod/paint-peinture_e.html).

For more information on lead paint in the home, please contact your local environmental health officer.

**For more BC HealthFile topics visit**  
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