



National Center for
Healthy Housing

Fact Sheet



Toys and Childhood Lead Exposure

Lead is a well known hazard. Children may be exposed to lead from toys that have been made in other countries and then imported into the country, or from antique toys and collectibles passed down through generations. The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) issues recalls of toys that could potentially expose children to lead.

How is lead used in manufacturing?

Paint: Lead may be found in the paint on toys. Lead paint was banned for use in house paint, on products marketed to children, and dishes or cookware in the United States in 1978; however, it is still widely used in other countries and therefore the reason it can be found in imported toys. It may also be found on older toys made in the United States before the ban in 1978.

Plastic: Lead may also be used in plastic toys to stabilize the plastic molecules from heat. It makes the plastic more flexible and softens the plastic so that it can go back to its original shape. The use of lead in plastics has not been banned. When the plastic is exposed to substances such as sunlight, air, and detergents, the chemical bond between the lead and plastics breaks down and forms a dust.

How can my child be exposed?

Lead is invisible to the naked eye and has no smell. Children may be exposed to lead from consumer products through normal hand-to-mouth activity. As part of normal development, young children often place their toys, fingers, and other objects in their mouth, which puts them in contact with the lead paint or dust.

How do I test a toy for lead?

The only accurate way to test a toy for lead is by a certified laboratory. Do-it-yourself kits are available. However, these kits do not indicate how much lead is present and their reliability at detecting low levels of lead has not been determined.

For more information, see NCHH's testing fact sheet at <http://www.nchh.org/factsheet-leadtestconprod.pdf>.

Should my child be tested for lead?

Your child's health care provider can help you decide whether to perform a blood test to see if your child has an elevated blood lead level. A blood lead test is the only way you can tell if your child has an elevated lead level. Most children with elevated blood lead levels have no symptoms. The health care provider can recommend treatment if your child has been exposed to lead.

How can I limit my child's exposure to lead in toys?

The Consumer Federation of America www.consumerfederation.org recommends the following steps:

1. Identify whether you have a product in your home that has been recalled. Go to www.cpsc.gov to determine whether the products in your home are subject to the recall.
2. If you do have a recalled toy in your home:
 - a. Take it out of your child's hands immediately;
 - b. Follow the manufacturer's instructions for the recall; do not just throw out the product; and
 - c. If the recalled toy contains lead, wipe down other toys that were near the recalled toy to catch lead dust.
3. Beware of young children's tendencies to put small toys in their mouths.
4. Beware of choking hazards, including small magnets. To determine if there are toys or parts of toys that may pose a choking hazard to a young child, use the inside of a toilet paper tube. If a toy or piece of a toy easily fits through, do not let children under three play with or have access to these toys.

How do I obtain more information about recalls?

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Photos and descriptions of recalled toys can be found by visiting www.recalls.gov.

If you have concerns about lead in toy jewelry see <http://www.cdc.gov/nceh/lead/faq/jewelry.htm> for information from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

What is the Federal government doing about this problem?

A working group of nine federal agencies has been convened to develop a comprehensive strategy to control sources of lead in food and consumer products through interagency collaboration and cooperation.

What can I do about this problem?

If you test a product and find that it is positive for lead, file a complaint with the CPSC at www.cpsc.gov/cgibin/incident.aspx. The CPSC needs to investigate the product and determine if it needs to be recalled.

The National Center for Healthy Housing is a leading 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization solely dedicated to establishing healthy, green, and safe homes for families across all income levels through research, education, training, and policy efforts. With more than six million families living in substandard housing, NCHH unites leaders in the public health, housing, and environmental communities to enact the changes needed to combat inadequate housing policies and practices. NCHH provides educational programs, tools and resources to help the public create and maintain a healthy home.