

Protecting Chicago Children from Lead Exposure: The Checklist

Safe Paint

If you live in a home built before 1978, your home most likely has lead-based paint. While lead paint is no longer sold, it can still be on the walls, windows, doors, and exteriors of your home. When this paint chips, peels, and cracks, it becomes a hazard to children's health.

___ Safely clean up lead paint and dust.

Inside your home, use a disposable wet cloth to clean up paint flakes or dust on windowsills, doors, baseboards, the floor, and on toys. Never sweep chipping paint or lead dust. Use a vacuum with a HEPA filter.

___ Cover bare soil.

Outside your home, check for peeling paint near soil and cover those areas with grass or mulch. Cover dirt in your yard with wood chips or grass, and cover walkways with cement or gravel, to help protect children from lead in the environment. Keep children's play areas away from bare soil. Take your shoes off when going inside so you don't track dirt into the house.

___ Keep paint in good condition, both inside and outside your home.

Cover peeling paint or plaster temporarily with tape or contact paper. A more permanent fix is to safely remove and replace lead-painted surfaces. Hire a certified renovator or lead abatement contractor to do this safely.

Safe Water

If you live in a single family or two-flat home built before 1986 in Chicago, your home most likely has a lead service line (the pipe that connects the water main in the street to your home).

___ Test lead levels in your home's water.

Any Chicago resident can have free lead testing from the Department of Water Management (DWM). The testing is done by a certified lab and your results will be sent to you. DWM will also schedule a follow-up visit if necessary and will provide free filters for any home with an elevated water lead level. You may request a free lead test kit by calling 311 or by visiting www.ChicagoWaterQuality.org.

___ Use a filter certified to remove lead.

If you live in a home with a lead service line or plumbing and have children under 6 years old, pregnant or breastfeeding women, or women who may become pregnant in the home, use a filter certified to remove lead. Be sure to look for filters certified by NSF/ANSI under Standard 53 and always follow a manufacturer's directions for use. Using a filter or bottled water from a lead-free source is especially important when preparing baby formula.

The City of Chicago will provide free filters to any home where water testing shows an elevated lead level, as well as to any home with a lead service line where a water meter has been installed or pipes have been disrupted.

Flush your water.

If your water has not been used for six hours or more, run your water for at least five minutes before using tap water for cooking and drinking. This flushes out water that has been sitting in your pipes and pulls through the corrosion control that the city adds to prevent lead and other contaminants from leaching into water. Everyday activities like taking a shower, doing laundry, washing dishes, and watering the lawn all count. Lead is not absorbed through the skin, so these activities are not a concern.

Use water from the cold water tap.

Drink and cook only with water from the cold water tap. Hot water can dissolve lead more quickly. Boiling water does not remove lead.

Clean your aerators.

Regularly (at least once per month) remove the screen and aerator from the tip of your faucets, rinse out any particles, and re-attach.

Safe Kids

EVERY child living in Chicago should be tested for lead as part of routine well-child care at age 1, age 2, and age 3 by their pediatrician or health care provider.

Make sure your child is tested for lead.

Your pediatrician should do this routinely at your young child's annual checkup (age 1, 2, and 3), but you should ask to be sure it is done. Children must have lead testing done to enter many preschool/Head Start programs. Lead testing is covered by health insurance plans, including Medicaid. Whenever a child is found to have a high blood lead level, a nurse and home inspector from the Chicago Department of Public Health work with the child's family to ensure appropriate testing and follow-up.

Wash hands and toys.

Lead dust and dirt can easily spread throughout a house. When small children crawl or play on the floor, or put their hands and toys in their mouth, lead can get into their bodies. Always wash hands before eating and after playing outdoors. Wash toys in soap and water regularly.

Eat a healthy diet.

Healthy eating is important for a child's growth and development. A child whose diet is lacking in foods that provide calcium, iron, or vitamin C may absorb more lead. Be sure your child eats healthy snacks and meals.