

Lead Exposure During Pregnancy and Breastfeeding

What is lead?

Lead is a heavy metal that has been used for thousands of years to make many products, and is part of our world today. Being exposed to too much lead can cause serious health problems. Young children and the developing fetus are most at risk. The good news is that you can prevent exposing your unborn or newborn baby to lead.

Why be concerned about lead?

Lead poisoning can cause serious harm to your baby's health.

Possible effects of lead poisoning:

- Lowered Intelligence
- Decreased Coordination
- Shortened Attention Span
- Aggressive Behavior
- Reading and Other Disabilities

How can you become lead poisoned?

Lead enters your body each time you breathe in fumes or dust, or swallow something that has lead in it. Many pregnant women have cravings to eat non-food items during pregnancy. This can cause exposure to lead. For adults, exposure normally happens through a job, during repair or remodeling of an older home, or while doing a hobby where lead is used. Making stained glass or jewelry with lead solder and target shooting are some examples. You or your housemates could be exposed to lead through a hobby or at your jobs. If a housemate is exposed to lead and does not shower and change clothing before coming home, you may then be exposed to the lead on their clothing, in their hair, etc.

How can your baby become exposed to lead?

Pregnant women with high blood lead levels can transfer lead to the baby through the placenta or through breast milk. Breastfeeding is still recommended unless the mother's blood lead level is so high that it would put the baby at risk.

How do you know if you or your baby have been exposed to lead?

There are no signs or symptoms of lead poisoning until you are very sick. The only way to know if you have been exposed to lead is to get a blood lead test by:

- Visiting your medical clinic (as part of your prenatal exam).
- Contacting the Unified Government Public Health Department for information.

If you live in a home built before 1978 and any remodeling is being done, you and your home should be tested to make sure that you and your baby are not being exposed to lead.

What can you do to prevent lead poisoning?

The best way to prevent lead exposure during pregnancy and breastfeeding is to:

- Talk about possible risks with your doctor if your job includes working with or around lead. You will need to decide if you should get a job transfer.
- Stay away from work areas during repair or remodeling of a house built before 1978.
- Never sand or scrape lead-based paint (all repair or remodeling needs to be done using lead-safe work practices).
- Have all household members who are exposed to lead through a hobby or job do the following:
 - shower after working with lead
 - wash their clothes separately from other household clothing
- Avoid eating non-food items, (such as soil, clay, plaster, paint chips, pottery), using herbal medicines, and traditional remedies or cosmetics.
- Test your home if you own your home and have children in the home 6 and under and the home was built before 1978. Contact the Unified Government Public Health

Department at 913-573-6714 or Community Development at 913-573-5100 about the kNOw Lead KCK Program..

- Avoid using imported pottery and leaded crystal for preparing or eating food.