

What are the dangers of lead in your working environment?

Lead is a highly toxic metal that has commonly been used in many household and industrial products—such as paint, solder, batteries, brass, car radiators, bullets, and pottery. Too much lead in the body, or lead poisoning, can cause serious and permanent health problems.

People who work in jobs that involve lead, such as sandblasting old paint or manufacturing lead-acid batteries, are at risk for lead poisoning. Workers can also bring lead home on shoes and work clothes, exposing their family to lead.

Children and pregnant women are also at risk for lead poisoning. The Health Department recommends testing all children at ages 1 and 2 and all adults who work with lead. The only way to find out if someone has been exposed to lead is by a blood test. Talk to your health care provider about testing.

What types of jobs can expose workers to lead?

Some examples of job settings where you can be exposed to lead:

- Brass, copper or lead foundries
- Demolition or welding of old structures
- Thermal stripping or sanding of old paint
- Welding of old, painted metal
- Paint manufacturing
- Spray finishing

- Machining and grinding lead alloys
- Battery manufacturing
- Radiator repair
- Scrap metal handling or wire reclamation
- Lead soldering
- Indoor firing ranges
- Ceramic glaze mixing
- Stained glass manufacture or repair

How could lead enter my body?

Lead can enter your body when you breathe in or swallow lead fumes or dust from your work area. You can easily swallow lead dust if you don't wash your hands and face before you eat, drink or smoke.

What are the signs and symptoms of lead poisoning?

You can have lead poisoning without noticing any symptoms. Even if you feel fine, lead can start building up in your body and may damage your kidneys and brain and your digestive, reproductive and blood systems. If you work around lead, you should see your health care provider regularly, even if you don't have symptoms.

Some early signs of lead poisoning include: fatigue, uneasy stomach, irritability or nervousness, poor appetite, headache, sleeplessness, metallic taste in mouth, and reproductive problems.

Later signs can include: aches or pains in stomach, constipation, nausea, weight loss, memory problems, muscle and joint pains, weak wrists or ankles, and kidney problems.

How can I reduce my exposure to lead in the workplace?

- **Use ventilation systems** while working and make sure they work properly.
- **Use the correct respirator.** Your employer must provide the right respirator for the job, make sure it's cleaned regularly and keep it in good working order.
- **Keep your work area clean.** Do not dry sweep or shake lead dust off clothes or surfaces. Use a vacuum to clean the area only if it has a High Efficiency Particulate Air (HEPA) filter; otherwise use wet-cleaning methods.
- **Do not eat, drink or smoke** in work areas.
- **Always wash your hands and face** before eating, drinking or smoking.
- **Eat a well-balanced diet.** Good nutrition may reduce the amount of lead absorbed by your body.
- **Store work clothes in a separate locker** from your street clothes.
- **Shower, wash your hair, and change** into clean clothes—including shoes—before leaving work.

What are the industry regulations for lead?

The federal Occupational Safety Health Administration (OSHA) requires employers to ensure the workplace is safe for workers who may be exposed to lead, under the OSHA General Industry Lead Standard.

OSHA also sets additional rules for construction workers exposed to lead under the OSHA Lead in Construction Standard. It covers all work related to construction, alteration or repair—including painting and decorating.

For more information about the OSHA standards, visit [osha.gov/SLTC/lead](https://www.osha.gov/SLTC/lead).

You can also call Vermont OHSA at (802) 828-0408 or (800) 287-2765 (toll-free in Vermont) or visit labor.vermont.gov/vosha.

For more information about the health effects of lead call the Healthy Homes Lead Poisoning Prevention Program at (802) 863-7220 or (800) 439-8550 (toll-free in Vermont) or visit healthvermont.gov.