



Earth911®  
More Ideas, Less Waste

[How to Recycle](#)

[Where to Recycle](#)

[Home & Garden](#)

Reading time: 4 mins

# Get the Lead Out (of Your Home)



By [Gemma Alexander](#)

© JAN 24, 2022 [building materials](#), [Red List](#)



Many people think that since lead was removed from paint and gasoline, it is no longer a threat. But nearly a third of American children have dangerously [elevated blood lead levels](#). While consumer products are probably the biggest source of lead exposure, lead is lurking in many – perhaps most – homes.

## Lead

Lead is a toxic heavy metal that occurs naturally in small amounts. Natural levels of lead in soil range between 50 and 400 parts per million (ppm), but human industrial activities have led to much higher levels of lead exposure. Lead can build

### What Do You Think?



**Are you considering moving because of climate change?**

- Yes
- I'm researching my options to decide
- No

NEXT

[Westlake Home – Luxury Organic Bedding](#)

up in the body and can be fatal at high levels.

Lead exposure damages every organ and system in the human body, especially the brain and central nervous system.

Although everyone is harmed by exposure to lead, the impacts are most profound for infants and children. No safe blood lead level in children has been identified. Even low levels of lead in blood have been shown to negatively affect a child's intelligence, ability to pay attention, and academic achievement. The [effects of lead](#) poisoning are permanent.

## Does Your Home Have Lead?

Lead was added to both interior and exterior paint until 1978. If your house was built before 1978, it could still contain layers of lead paint. The older your house is, the more likely it is that lead paint is [still present](#) in or on it. Homes built before 1986 are more likely to have lead pipes, fixtures, and solder, which can corrode, allowing lead to enter [drinking water](#). About [one-third](#) of the country's water districts still use lead supply pipes.

In 2011, changes to the Safe Drinking Water Act [reduced the maximum allowable lead](#) content in plumbing as well as solder and flux. Problems with lead leaching into water occur more often in homes with brass faucets (even when they are chrome-plated) and with fixtures that use lead solder.

The best way to find out if your home contains lead is to [test for it](#). You can use a [3M LeadCheck Swab](#) from the hardware store to test surfaces and [have your home's water tested](#) to find out if any lead is leaching into it. If there is lead in your water, or if you want to prevent leaching in the first place, contact your utility to find out about your supply pipes. You can check for [lead pipes inside your home](#) yourself. If you are planning a remodeling project, have a certified inspector conduct a lead risk assessment before you start. You might also consider [testing the soil](#) in your yard, especially in areas where you grow vegetables or where children play.



While it's expensive, replacing your lead pipes is the safest course of action.

## Getting Rid of Lead

As with [asbestos](#), lead paint that is not damaged is best sealed and left alone. Simply add a new coat of low-VOC paint over any surfaces that have been painted with lead paint, being careful not to disturb the underlying layers. However, if the lead paint is peeling, chipping, chalking, cracking, damaged, or damp, as occurs in high wear areas like windowsills, it is a hazard and must be removed. This is not a DIY project: Find an EPA or state [lead-safe certified renovation contractor](#).


If your water supply pipes contain lead, consider purchasing an [NSF/ANSI Standard 53 certified water filter](#) that is certified for lead removal. In some communities with lead supply pipes, such as [Newark, New Jersey](#), these filters may be available directly from your water utility. If you have lead pipes inside your home, consider replacing them. Replacing your plumbing is expensive, but it is the safest course of action. There are [some federal grants](#) to help replace residential pipes. Check with your local utility to find out if additional incentives or local grants are available.

If the lead level in your soil is elevated above 5,000 ppm, you may need to find a certified contractor to replace the surface soil. At lower levels, you may be able to safely grow crops with good soil management. Frequent handwashing, keeping shoes outside of the house, and wet dusting will all help keep lead dust from building up indoors.

## Avoiding Lead

Once you have taken abatement steps to seal or replace old lead paint and plumbing, you'll want to avoid reintroducing lead into your home. Lead is still used in some applications today, as in solder and [roof flashings](#). These lead sources are unlikely to result in lead exposure during daily life. But be careful when bringing second-hand building materials and household items (whether for aesthetic or sustainability reasons) into the house. Building [reuse stores](#) sometimes accept older materials, like doors and stair railings, which could contain lead. Similarly, many imported [ceramics](#) and [vintage housewares](#) also contain lead. It's best to assume that the paint on vintage items contains lead until testing proves otherwise.

**Lead can be found throughout a child's environment.**



The infographic shows a living and dining area with five numbered callouts: 1. A window with peeling paint; 2. A person drinking from a water tap; 3. A child playing with toys; 4. A bowl of candy; 5. A person holding a small object, possibly jewelry.

- 1** Homes built before 1978 (when lead-based paints were banned) probably contain lead-based paint.
 

When the paint peels and cracks, it makes lead dust. Children can be poisoned when they swallow or breathe in lead dust.
- 2** Certain water pipes may contain lead.
- 3** Lead can be found in some products such as toys and toy jewelry.
- 4** Lead is sometimes in candies imported from other countries or traditional home remedies.
- 5** Certain jobs and hobbies involve working with lead-based products, like stain glass work, and may cause parents to bring lead into the home.

Source: [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#)

Despite regulations, it is not safe to assume that new consumer items are lead-free. Many [toys](#) and crafts (like stained glass) and even some [cosmetics](#) still contain lead. Even more dangerously, some [folk remedies](#) for stomach upset and morning sickness contain lead.

advertising



Reading time: 4 mins

### [What Can You Do About Nonpoint Source Pollution?](#)



By [Gemma Alexander](#)

Gemma Alexander has an M.S. in urban horticulture and a backyard filled with native plants. After working in a genetics laboratory and at a landfill, she now writes about the environment, the arts and family. See more of her writing [here](#).

Related Post