

# LEAD TESTING: ALSO IMPORTANT IN ADULTS

No amount of lead is safe, even for adults

## Adults, Just Like Children, Can Have Lead Poisoning



Because adults can be exposed to lead in a variety of ways, it's important for health care providers to talk to their patients about lead exposure.

Common symptoms of lead poisoning in adults include nausea, constipation, upset stomach, fatigue, impaired concentration, hearing loss, and joint pain, among many others.<sup>1</sup> Lead poisoning in adults can have long-term effects, such as decreased fertility and high blood pressure. The severity of symptoms depends on the level of exposure; some people might show no symptoms at all. The only way to know if someone has lead poisoning is to do a blood lead test.

## Three Ways Adults are at Risk

 THEIR JOB	 THEIR HOBBIES	 THEIR REMEDIES AND HABITS
<p>Common jobs with lead exposure include painting, welding, torch cutting, auto body paint work, renovation, radiator repair, bridge work, shooting range work, demolition, battery manufacturing, metal production, metal scrap work, ceramic work, soldering, and plumbing.<sup>2</sup></p>	<p>Hobbies such as casting bullets or fishing sinkers, home remodeling, target shooting at firing ranges, lead soldering, auto repair, stained glass making, and glazed pottery making can put adults at increased risk.<sup>1</sup></p>	<p>Some folk remedies, traditional medicines, health foods, moonshine whiskies, and ceramic wares can contain lead.<sup>1</sup> Individuals may try to self-treat lead poisoning with over-the-counter medication, which is not advised.</p>

## What Health Care Providers Can Do

### Test any patients who may be exposed to lead.

- If the blood lead level is 3.5 µg/dL or higher, action is needed (see back side).
- If the blood lead level is below 3.5 µg/dL, monitor blood lead level if continued exposure is likely.

**Recommend testing of household members.** If the blood lead level is 3.5 µg/dL or higher, encourage testing for people who live in the home or visit it regularly, especially children and pregnant women.

### Encourage activities that reduce exposure<sup>1</sup>:

- Wash hands before eating, drinking, or smoking.
- Wear a clean, properly fitted respirator in areas with lead dust or fumes.
- Keep items used on the job, such as toolboxes and lunch coolers, in the trunk of the car.
- Shower (if possible) and change into clean clothes and shoes after working with lead, preferably before going home.
- Launder lead-soiled clothes separately from other clothing.

References on back



**BUREAU OF ENVIRONMENTAL AND OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH**  
WISCONSIN DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH SERVICES | DIVISION OF PUBLIC HEALTH  
DHSENVHEALTH@WI.GOV | SEPTEMBER 2022 | P-01293 (09/2022)

**Health care providers can help  
ensure adult patients are lead-free.  
Lead poisoning is dangerous but preventable!**

# Management Guidelines for Blood Lead Levels in Adults

According to the Council of State and Territorial Epidemiologists:

Blood lead level monitoring (BLL) should be done on a schedule based on an individual's risk of exposure to lead. Primary management of lead poisoning is source identification and the elimination or reduction of further exposure.

Treatment decisions, including chelation, should be made in consultation with a physician knowledgeable about lead poisoning medical management.<sup>3</sup>

Blood Lead Level	Management Recommendations <sup>3</sup>
<3.5	No action needed Monitor BLL if ongoing exposure
3.5-9	Discuss health risks Minimize exposure Consider removal for pregnancy and certain medical conditions Monitor BLL
10-19	Decrease exposure Remove from exposure for pregnancy Consider removal for certain medical conditions or BLL ≥10 for an extended period of time Monitor BLL
20-29	Remove from exposure for pregnancy Remove from exposure if repeat BLL in 4 weeks remains ≥20 Annual lead medical exam recommended
30-49	Remove from exposure Prompt medical evaluation
50-79	Remove from exposure Prompt medical evaluation Consider chelation with significant symptoms
≥80	Remove from exposure Urgent medical evaluation Chelation may be indicated

## References

<sup>1</sup>Lead Exposure in Adults—A Guide for Health Care Providers. New York Department of Health, March 2009. Retrieved from <https://www.health.ny.gov/publications/2584/>

<sup>2</sup>If You Work Around Lead, Don't Take It Home (OSHA Quick Card). Occupational Safety and Health Administration, June 2014.

<sup>3</sup>Revised Management Guidelines for Blood Lead Levels in Adults. Council of State and Territorial Epidemiologists, Occupational Subcommittee, December 2021. Retrieved from <https://www.cste.org/page/CSTEPublications>

Icon credits: The Noun Project users @LuisPrado, DKHN, and Stephen Hemenway

Questions about lead poisoning and treatment?  
[dhsenvhealth@wi.gov](mailto:dhsenvhealth@wi.gov)

