Lead poisoning

Also called: plumbism

A buildup of lead in the body, usually over months or years.

**Rare**

Fewer than 200,000 US cases per year

- Treatable by a medical professional
- Requires a medical diagnosis
- Lab tests or imaging always required
- Medium-term: resolves within months

Lead-based paint and its dust, usually found in older buildings, are common sources of exposure. Young children are especially at risk. Occupational exposure, such as welding, is a more common cause for adults.

Symptoms include developmental delays, abdominal pain, neurologic changes, and irritability. At very high levels, it can be fatal.

Treatment always involves avoiding further exposure to lead or lead-based products and may include medications to help remove lead from the body.

### Ages affected

- 0-2
- 3-5
- 6-13
- 14-18
- 19-40
- 41-60
- 60+

### Symptoms

**Requires a medical diagnosis**

Symptoms include developmental delays, abdominal pain, neurologic changes, and irritability. At very high levels, it can be fatal.

**Can have no symptoms, but people may experience:**

- **Pain areas:** in the abdomen or joints
- **Gastrointestinal:** constipation, nausea, or vomiting
- **Developmental:** learning disability or slow growth
- **Whole body:** fatigue or loss of appetite
- **Behavioral:** hyperactivity or irritability
- **Also common:** baby colic, headache, insomnia, or memory loss
Treatments

Treatment depends on severity
Treatment always involves avoiding further exposure to lead or lead-based products and may include medications to help remove lead from the body.

Medications

**Heavy metal toxicity medication:** Attaches to and carries metals out of the body through urine or stool.
- Dimercaprol (Bal in Oil)
- Edetate calcium disodium
- Ethylenediaminetetraacetic acid
- Dimercaptosuccinic acid (Chemet)
- Penicillamine (Cuprimine, Penicillamine(D-), and Depen Titratabs)

Preventative

**Avoid exposure:** Reducing contact with things that can cause or worsen disease.

Specialists

- **Pediatrician:** Provides medical care for infants, children, and teenagers.
- **Toxicologist:** Focuses on the effects of chemicals on health.
- **Neurologist:** Treats nervous system disorders.
- **Primary care provider (PCP):** Prevents, diagnoses, and treats diseases.
- **Occupational medicine doctor:** Prevents and treats illness in the workplace.

Consult a doctor for medical advice

**Note:** The information you see describes what usually happens with a medical condition, but doesn't apply to everyone. This information isn't medical advice, so make sure to contact a healthcare provider if you have a medical problem. If you think you may have a medical emergency, call your doctor or an emergency number immediately.

**Sources:** Mayo Clinic and others. Learn more