

Older Adults Exposure to Lead

What is Lead?

Lead is a metal that can be found in air, soil, water, and inside our homes. Lead is found in many materials, such as batteries, cosmetics, water pipes, and faucets. Lead may be found in paint used in homes built before 1978. Lead can be harmful to a person's health. It is best to avoid any exposure to lead.



How can an older adult be exposed to lead?

More than 80 percent of exposure to lead in Michigan adults comes from the workplace. The most common work exposures in Michigan are:

- removal of lead paint used in homes built before 1978
- brass and bronze manufacturing
- recycling of lead batteries
- working at a gun range (instructor or maintenance)

Adults can also be exposed through tap water from pipes and faucets that contain lead.

What health problems can lead cause in an older adult?

Almost everyone has been exposed to lead at some time in their life. However, it's not common for an adult to experience health problems from lead exposures. An adult body can remove more lead than a child's body. However, older adults who have been exposed to lead over time may experience some health problems, such as:

- Increased blood pressure
- Decreased kidney function
- Decreased cognitive function
- Slower reaction times
- Altered mood and behavior

Older adults who are exposed to higher amounts of lead, such as in the workplace over a period of time, could experience other health problems. These might include:

- Anemia
- Severe stomach ache, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, and/or constipation
- Muscle weakness or soreness
- Increased risk of heart disease

Should older adults have their blood tested for lead?

Talk with your doctor if you are concerned about your recent or ongoing exposure to lead. Your doctor may order a blood lead test to learn how much lead is in your blood.

Good nutrition is one way to protect yourself from small amounts of lead. Include calcium, iron, and vitamin C in your diet. This may help keep lead from being absorbed in your body.

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