



## Department of Environmental Protection

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### **Lead Contamination in Your Yard**

#### **Reducing the Risks: A Homeowner's Guide**

Lead poisoning is one of the top environmental health threats to children. Over time, exposure to even low levels of lead can affect a child's growth, behavior, and learning ability. Children under six years of age are particularly vulnerable to lead poisoning.

In addition to the lead paint hazards that exist inside many homes - especially in older buildings - another significant threat can be found in the soil of some yards. Children can become exposed to lead when playing in the dirt or tracking it into the house on their shoes and clothing.

#### **How can lead get into the soil in my yard?**

There are two major sources. As exterior house paint ages, chips and dust that may contain lead fall to the ground and into the soil. This is a greater concern if you live in an older building: until 1978, lead was a primary ingredient in oil-based residential paints. Lead was also used in gasoline until the mid-1980s and may have settled into your yard from car exhaust.

#### **How will I know if there is lead in my yard?**

The only way to know for certain is to have your soil tested. To order a soil analysis, contact:

[University of Massachusetts Soil & Plant Tissue Testing Laboratory](#)

If you do not want to test and you live in an older home, near a major roadway, or have neighbors who have found lead in the soil of their yards, there is a good chance you have lead in your yard. In that case, it may be best to play it safe and follow the advice below.

#### **What can I do to protect my family from lead in my yard?**

If you have lead in your yard, here are some things you can do:

- Discourage children from playing on bare soil - provide a sandbox, if possible - and make sure they wash their hands after playing outside, especially before eating.
- Wash toys before bringing them into the house or leave them outside.
- Keep your pets clean. Dogs and cats can bring dirt inside on their paws or fur.

- Clean up any dirt that is tracked into the house. Use a wet mop whenever you can, since sweeping or vacuuming can stir up dust in the air.
- Wash clothing that is heavily soiled with dirt from the yard separately from other laundry.
- Improve or replace the soil in areas of your yard that are used for gardening or use raised beds. Keep in mind that vegetables grown above ground (e.g., tomatoes and squash) are safer for eating than root vegetables (e.g., potatoes and carrots).
- During the summer months, when dust is a problem, clean window sills with a damp cloth or sponge once a week.
- Keep exterior house paint in good condition. Old paint can peel and flake off into the soil.

### **What else can I do to make my yard safer?**

There are several steps that you can take - including simply planting grass or shrubs - to create an effective safety barrier:

- **Play Areas** can be made safer by properly locating them in the yard. Place swing sets and sand boxes away from areas where there is lead in soil. Use clean sand in the sand box. Children sometimes put toys and/or hands in their mouths, so make sure sandboxes are covered when not in use to prevent lead dust from getting into them.
- **Walkways** that are not paved create dust. Paving walkways with concrete or asphalt will limit dust and dirt that may be carried into the house. You may also use bricks, wood chips, or heavy gravel.
- **Parking Areas** should be confined to driveways or parking lots that are either paved or covered with gravel. Cars parked all over the yard can destroy grass and create dust that may contain lead.
- **The Drip Zone** is the narrow three foot strip around the foundation of your house. This is usually where the highest levels of lead are found. This is because over the years, paint chips containing lead have fallen to the ground and mixed with the top layer of soil. Cover this area with mulch, crushed stone, or a landscaping cloth.
- **Lawns** that are healthy will reduce exposure to lead in soil. Keeping your lawn healthy is the best and most practical solution for those who want to use their yards for playing and relaxing.

### **For More Information**

- U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)  
[Lead Information Center](#)
- Massachusetts Department of Public Health (DPH)  
[Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Program](#)
- MassDEP  
[Lead Information](#)

