

# Work Safe!



**What Construction  
Workers Should Know  
About Lead Poisoning**



## **Protect your family from lead poisoning.**

Lead that is brought home on work clothes and equipment can cause learning and behavior problems in young children.

- Wash and shower before leaving work.
- Change out of work clothes and boots before going home or getting into your car.
- Wash work clothes separately from other household laundry.
- Ask a doctor about testing family members.
- Make sure that all children get tested for lead poisoning at ages 1 and 2.



**Lead paint is a health hazard found at many construction sites.**

## **Lead poisoning has serious health effects.**

Most adults with lead poisoning do not feel or look sick. Here are some symptoms they may feel:

- Headaches
- Stomach cramps
- Constipation
- Muscle or joint pain
- Trouble sleeping
- Loss of sex drive
- Fatigue
- Irritability

Exposure to lead for a long time may cause:

- High blood pressure
- Nerve disorders
- Brain damage
- Kidney damage
- Reproductive damage

## **What your blood lead test means**

**5 mcg/dL:** You have been exposed to lead

**25 mcg/dL:** You need more protection or should be removed from lead work

**40 mcg/dL:** Your employer must offer a medical exam

**50 mcg/dL:** Your employer must remove you from lead work





## **Workers are exposed by breathing lead dust or lead fumes.**

Lead dust on workers' hands can be accidentally swallowed while eating, drinking or smoking.

Painters, ironworkers, laborers and demolition crews working on lead-painted structures are most at risk. These activities may expose workers to high lead levels:

- Abrasive blasting
- Torch-cutting, burning and welding
- Using grinders, sanders, needle guns, scalers and other power tools
- Rivet busting
- Dry scraping and sanding
- Cleaning up lead-contaminated work areas

## **Workers can help prevent lead poisoning.**

- Use safe work practices and engineering controls.
- Use wet cleaning methods and HEPA vacuums to clean work areas. Never dry sweep or use compressed air.
- Wear a proper respirator and keep it clean.
- Wash hands and face before eating, drinking and smoking. Never eat, drink or smoke in the work area.
- Use separate clothes and boots for work.
- Get regular blood lead tests.

# Federal and state laws require employers to protect workers from exposure to lead.

## Employers must:

- Use safe work practices and engineering controls to protect workers.
- Inspect lead work areas and test the air for lead.
- Keep work areas clean.
- Provide:
  - Proper respirators and protective clothing.
  - Hand-washing stations and showers.
  - Clean areas for taking breaks, eating and changing clothes.
- Train workers about workplace lead hazards and ways to prevent lead exposure.
- Provide regular blood lead tests.
- Provide medical exams to workers exposed to lead if they have:
  - A blood lead level of 40 mcg/dL or higher.
  - Lead poisoning symptoms.
  - Concerns about their ability to have a healthy child.
- Remove workers from lead work if their blood lead level is 50 mcg/dL or higher.

## Best practices.

Since health effects may occur below the mandatory removal level of 50 mcg/dL, many employers offer more than the law requires.

## Employers should:

- Provide monthly blood lead testing.
- Keep track of blood lead levels.
- Improve worker protections if blood lead levels increase.
- Remove workers from lead work if their blood lead level is 25 mcg/dL or higher.

## Prevent Lead Poisoning

- Use Safe Work Practices
- Get Tested for Lead
- Protect your Family:  
Leave Lead at Work

**Employers must provide a safe and healthy workplace.**

**For more information:**  
**Call 311** or go to **[nyc.gov/health](https://nyc.gov/health)**