

Lead aware tips

Handwashing and drying is one of the most effective ways to keep lead out of the body.

Eating healthy food, especially breakfast is important. Children absorb less lead when they have a stomach full of healthy food.

Use tap water. Do not drink or use rainwater for preparation of food and drinks, or for cooking.

Around the home damp wipe and mop surfaces and floors. Wash children's toys often.

Vacuum carpets often and when children are not present. Leave shoes outside to help keep lead dust out.

Clean windows, sills, air conditioner filters and fan blades regularly. Keep doors and windows closed on windy days.

Wash and brush pets regularly. Always wash and dry hands well after playing with pets.

For more information

Yorke and Northern Local Health Network
Environmental Health Centre
117 Gertrude Street
Port Pirie SA 5540
Telephone: (08) 8638 4100
sahealth.sa.gov.au/ehc

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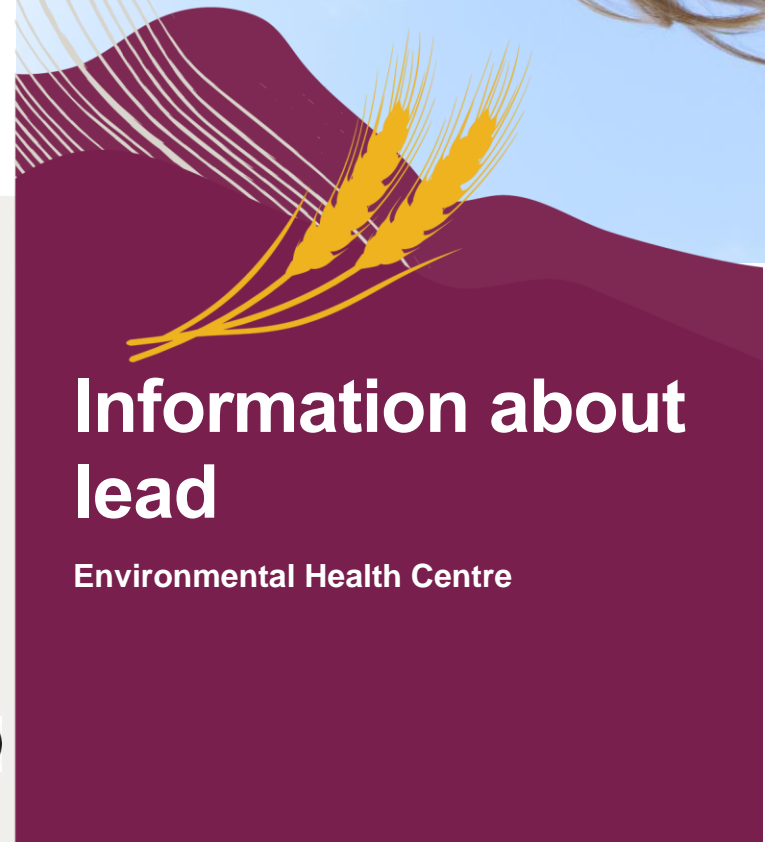


This document has been reviewed and endorsed by Yorke and Northern Local Health Network consumers and the community.



Information about lead

Environmental Health Centre



What is lead?

Lead is a heavy metal, commonly used in batteries, cables, welding materials and solder. It is not an alloy but is still used in the manufacture of alloys and chemicals. Lead is still used in vehicle batteries, pottery glazes and some paints. It is not used in the manufacture of pencils, so sucking or chewing pencils will not release lead into your system. Some water pipes in older homes are made from lead or are soldered together with lead solder.

How does lead get into your body?

The lead in our blood comes from the lead in our environment. Lead can be taken into our body with the food we eat, the water we drink and the air we breathe.

Lead gets into the environment through lead mining and smelting, lead in old paint and previous use in petrol.

In Port Pirie, lead contaminated house dust is the major source of exposure to young children. Lead settles on houses and is washed into rainwater tanks. Around the home, it can be blown in from outside or fall through cracks in the ceiling. If children are playing in dirt and dust outside, lead on their hands or under their fingernails can get into the mouth and be swallowed.

What happens when lead gets into your body?

Lead affects the blood system by first entering the blood stream and attaching itself to red blood cells, to then be carried around the body. Even small amounts of lead can interfere with the normal function of these red blood cells, which carry oxygen to all parts of the body. Lead also affects the bones and the nervous system, particularly the brain.

How does lead get out of your body?

Lead cannot be breathed out or sweated out through the skin. Some lead is passed through faeces, although most lead is passed out in the urine. It is also stored in the body, particularly in the bones, if you are not getting enough calcium in your diet. Most lead will be passed out of the body over a period of time. Some of the lead that has been stored in the bones will re-enter the blood stream and gradually be passed out in the urine.

When the amount of lead entering the body is greater than the amount of lead being passed out of the body, elevated blood lead levels occur.

How do you know what your blood lead level is?

Blood lead tests are taken by a simple prick of the finger. The blood sample is then sent to the laboratory and analysed to determine the lead level.

Lead levels are measured in $\mu\text{g}/\text{dL}$ (micrograms per decilitre).

The National Health and Medical Research Council recommends that if a person has a blood lead level higher than 5 micrograms per decilitre ($\mu\text{g}/\text{dL}$) the source of exposure should be investigated further, particularly if the person is a child or pregnant.

Who should be tested?

- Babies and pre-school children should have regular tests as they are at increased risk of elevated blood lead levels
- Pregnant women and women planning a pregnancy should be tested as blood lead levels are passed on from the mother to their unborn baby

Where can a blood lead test be taken?

Environmental Health Centre

An appointment can be made by phoning (08) 8638 4100 or calling into the Centre.

SA Pathology

Pregnant women who have routine blood tests at SA Pathology may request extra blood be taken for lead analysis.

The Environmental Health Centre provides services free of charge.