

What does a blood lead test involve?

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).

Australia's National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) advises if a person has a blood lead level greater than $5 \mu\text{g}/\text{dL}$ the source of the exposure should be investigated and reduced, particularly if the person is a child or pregnant woman.

For more information

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



Babies, caregivers and lead

Environmental Health Centre

Lead exposure in Port Pirie

Babies are vulnerable to environmental lead exposure and can absorb more than 50% of the lead that enters their bodies. As their brain and nervous system is developing and growing rapidly they are more susceptible to the effects of lead.

- The major risk of exposure for a new baby is house dust (or dirt) contaminated with lead
- Lead dust is carried on hands, shoes and clothing of adults and builds up on baby clothes and bed linen left outside to dry
- Research in Port Pirie shows that washing left outside overnight can collect a large amount of lead-bearing dust
- Rainwater, if used, can be another major source of lead for babies

As babies get older and they spend more time on the floor and begin to put toys and objects into their mouths, their blood lead level can rise quite quickly. Increasing the frequency of hand washing and drying at this stage is very important.

Your baby's own first blood lead test should be at the age of 6 ½ months.

Protect your baby

Be lead aware around babies

- Wash and dry your hands before preparing formula, feeding or handling a baby
- Use tap water when making formula, drinks or sterilizing bottles. Drinking rainwater is not recommended in Port Pirie
- Dropped bottles and dummies should be cleaned before returning to baby, and dropped food must be thrown away
- Keep a spare clean dummy in a sealed container
- Wash children's sip cups or water bottles regularly and pay attention to lids and straws
- Place your baby's cot/bassinet away from windows and curtains
- Before laying baby on the floor put down a clean rug or blanket
- Wash baby toys and playthings regularly
- Store and wash baby clothes separately from other family clothing and dry indoors if possible
- Keep prams, bassinets, car seats and capsules as clean and dust free as possible
- Try not to push your baby into the wind when out walking with the pram
- When doing a dirty or potentially lead hazardous job, do not cuddle a baby until you have showered, washed your hair and changed your clothes
- Encourage adults/children to wash their hands and change out of work clothes before holding and playing with your baby

Housekeeping

By following these tips, you will be protecting the child in your care:

- Vacuum floors when your baby is not in the room
- Wash floor rugs and blankets regularly
- Wet mop floors and damp dust surfaces
- Keep drying time on outside clothes lines to a minimum
- Reduce dust and dirt entering your home by leaving shoes outside
- Wash and brush pets frequently as pet fur can trap lead dust. Always wash and dry hands after playing with pets

How do you know what your blood lead level is?

The only way you can tell what your blood lead level is, is by having a regular blood lead test.

As there is lead in the environment, everyone will have some lead in their bodies. No-one will have a blood lead test result of zero µg/dL. Knowing your blood lead level will enable you to monitor your exposure and absorption of lead.

Low blood lead levels should not be interpreted as a sign that testing is no longer necessary – it only indicates the current levels of lead in the body.