

Fact Sheet

Lead in everyday household items

Lead is present in many everyday household items. Modern laws control the levels of lead in many items to reduce the risk of exposure. However, some older products or those manufactured in some overseas countries, may contain high levels of lead that can be a health hazard for you and your family. Young children and unborn babies are at greatest risk from lead exposure.

How can lead affect my health?

Lead is not required for normal body functions and can be harmful to your health. There is no level of lead exposure that is safe.

Unborn babies, infants and young children are most vulnerable to harm from lead. Repeated exposure to low levels of lead can affect IQ and cause behavioural and learning difficulties in children.

In adults, long-term exposure to low levels of lead may be associated with weakness in fingers, wrists and ankles, headaches, fatigue, small increases in blood pressure, anaemia and affect nerve and kidney function. People with diabetes have a higher risk of kidney damage.

At very high exposure levels, lead can severely damage brain and kidney function and ultimately cause death.

Why is lead present in household items?

Lead is a metal that has been used widely in the past, particularly in petrol and paint. While strategies to reduce lead exposure have significantly lowered the lead content in common household items, lead is still required for some items to work properly.

Some items, especially those manufactured overseas, can unintentionally contain lead due to contaminated components or ingredients, or accidental contamination during manufacturing or packaging processes.

Lead content in some household items imported, manufactured and sold in Australia, is controlled by agencies such as Australian Customs, Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC), Australian Building Codes Board, and state government health agencies.

Items include [plumbing fixtures](#), [cosmetics](#), [children's toys and finger paints](#), [kitchenware](#), [household and toy paint](#), and other [household items](#).

The ACCC is the regulator responsible for recalls of consumer goods that are a [health or safety risk](#).

Lead-acid batteries

The most common product containing lead is lead-acid batteries, found in cars. They are also used in boats, caravans, camper trailers, and camping solar systems.

Smaller lead-acid batteries can be used in specialised household items such as alarm systems, emergency lighting, computer power supplies, and other items that rely on rechargeable battery power.

Once lead-acid batteries have reached the end of their useful life, their casings can deteriorate, and lead can leak out.

Do not attempt to dismantle or recycle used lead-acid batteries at home, as they contain extremely high amounts of lead dissolved in acid. Handling or heating batteries can release lead fumes, particles and dust into the air you breathe, into your mouth and onto your skin.

Do not stockpile old batteries in sheds or backyards where children can access them and they can contaminate nearby soil and water.



Used lead-acid batteries are a hazardous waste and should not be disposed in household bins. There are many recycling options available through [state government](#), local councils and [retailers](#) provided online. Be careful when transporting old batteries as they can split open.

Plumbing products

Copper pipes with lead-based solder may be present in some older homes. Some plumbing products, such as brass tap fittings, manufactured overseas and in Australia contain lead. Lead in plumbing can dissolve into the water if it sits in contact with brass fittings for extended periods.

Hot water and rainwater systems may allow lead to dissolve in the water, due to heat and the slight acidity of rainwater.

Ceramic and crystal kitchenware

Some ceramic items, especially decorative painted items imported from overseas, can contain lead. These include:

- > Ceramic crockery
- > Handcrafted traditional glazed terra cotta
- > Clay pottery
- > Antique or homemade tableware

Lead from ceramic kitchenware can be released into food or beverages during cooking, storage or serving, particularly with acidic food and drinks. They include citrus fruit and juices, tomatoes, soy sauce, salad dressing, soft drinks, alcohol, tea and coffee.

Crystal glassware not labelled as lead-free is likely to contain some lead. While occasional use of leaded crystal will not expose you to large amounts of lead, storing liquids in lead crystal glassware, such as decanters, for long periods can cause lead to leach into beverages and increase your risk of lead exposure.

What other household items might contain lead?

- > Fishing sinkers
- > Leadlight glass
- > Roof flashing
- > Shot and ammunition
- > Artist paint
- > Curtain weights
- > Antiques such as old coins and lead figurines
- > Old candlewicks (manufactured before 2002)
- > Painted or varnished items manufactured before mid-1970s such as old furniture, baby cots and garden furniture
- > Imported or overseas made children's toys and jewellery
- > Imported artificial (synthetic) grass
- > Imported cosmetics
- > Imported canned food
- > Imported glazed ceramic tiles
- > Imported plastic or vinyl venetian blinds (manufactured before 1997)
- > Complementary medicine bought online or from overseas
- > Some spices bought online or from overseas

You cannot tell if items contain lead by just looking at them. Home test kits found in some hardware stores might tell you if some of these items contain lead, however, their accuracy is limited. Laboratory testing is the most reliable method of testing, but it can be expensive.

If you are unsure whether an item contains lead, assume it does and take precautions.

How can I reduce the risk of lead exposure from household items?

- > Recycle or dispose of used lead-acid batteries safely.
- > Do not cook, heat or store food and drinks (especially those that are highly acidic or alcoholic) in kitchenware containing lead.
- > Pregnant women and children should not eat or drink out of lead containing glazed ceramics or leaded crystalware.
- > Be careful when purchasing items from overseas and when buying online, laws in the country of origin may not be as strict as Australia.
- > Only use water from cold water taps for drinking and cooking.
- > Flush cold water taps used for drinking and cooking for 10 seconds first thing in the morning, or for at least 2 minutes if they haven't been used in the last 48 hours.
- > Check ACCC's product safety website for lead related product recalls.
- > Keep small items containing lead such as fishing sinkers, figurines out of the reach of children.
- > Address [damaged paint](#) (especially if painted before mid-1970s) on old furniture.

What should I do if I have been exposed to lead?

Talk to your doctor if you think you or a member of your may have been exposed to lead. Your doctor may recommend a blood test to check if you have been exposed.

More information

- > SA Health
www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/lead
www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/wps/wcm/connect/public+content/sa+health+internet/healthy+living/protecting+your+health/environmental+health/lead+reducing+your+exposure/lead+paint+and+your+health
- > Lead-acid batteries
www.whichbin.sa.gov.au
www.cyb.com.au/our-priorities/environment/recycling
- > Australian Government Department of Agriculture, Water and Environment website on lead in ceramic crockery
www.environment.gov.au/protection/chemicals-management/lead/lead-in-ceramic-crockery-pottery-making

For more information

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Health Protection and Licensing Services
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