

Fact Sheet

Lead exposure from leadlight and stained glass

Lead is often present in leadlight and stained glass. People may be exposed to lead when these items deteriorate over time or during home renovations if they are disturbed or damaged. People who work with, or enjoy hobbies involving, stained glass or lead lighting are also at risk of harm from lead exposure.



How can lead affect your health?

Exposure to lead can be harmful to people of all ages. There is no safe level of lead exposure and unborn babies, infants, and young children are most vulnerable to harm. Lead can enter the body by breathing in or swallowing lead-contaminated dust or lead fumes.

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 damaged nerve and renal function. People with diabetes who are exposed to lead over long periods have a higher risk of kidney damage.

How can leadlight and stained glass become a risk for you and your family?

Leadlight and stained glass contain lead in the dividers (called lead comes) that hold small pieces of glass to make a larger panel, or in the solder which connects the dividers.

Over time, the lead dividers or solder can deteriorate (oxidise) causing a white powdery dust to accumulate on leadlight and stained glass and nearby surfaces such as ledges of windows and doors with leadlight. This dust can stick to your hands, meaning you can accidentally swallow lead-contaminated dust. Young children may touch these items and then suck their fingers or lick or suck leadlight or stained glass items, such as lamp shades. Leadlight can be disturbed or damaged during home renovations causing lead-contaminated dust to settle on surfaces around your home. This can increase the risk of lead exposure.

Working with leadlight and stained glass

Working with leadlight and stained glass can expose you to lead fumes when heating solder, or to lead-contaminated dust released when cutting frames or lead comes. You can also bring lead-contaminated dust home on your clothes, shoes, hair, skin and personal items such as bags and mobile phones. This is called take-home lead and it can put your family at risk.



Ways to reduce the risk from leadlight and stained glass in your home

- > **Regularly clean leadlight, stained glass and the surfaces around these items.** Wipe surfaces with a damp cloth that has been soaked in water mixed with a gentle dish detergent. Use sugar soap (available from hardware stores) for cleaning after renovations involving leadlight and stained glass.
- > **Protect damaged or deteriorating leadlight and stained glass.** If items are deteriorating or damaged, or before you start renovating, discuss options to cover or enclose leadlight and stained glass in doors and windows with a leadlight specialist or qualified contractor. This will reduce the possibility of generating lead-contaminated dust around your home.
- > **Keep leadlight and stained glass items out of reach of children.** Small portable items containing leadlight or stained glass such as lamp shades, candle holders and photo frames should be kept out of reach of children.

Ways to reduce your risk of lead exposure and take-home lead when working or enjoying hobbies with leadlight and stained glass

- > **Minimise dust generation** during your work or hobby. For example, wet down lead comes before cutting and use a sharp knife rather than sawing.
- > **Keep pregnant women, young children, and pets** away from your hobby or work area.
- > **Protect yourself:**
 - Wear appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE), such as masks and gloves.
 - Avoid eating, drinking, smoking, and touching your face while in your hobby or work area.
 - Wash and dry your hands before eating and drinking.
- > **Protect your family** from take-home lead:
 - Shower and change into clean clothes and shoes before going home or before you are in contact with your family.
 - Wash your work or hobby clothes separately from other items.
 - Keep personal items such as mobile phones sealed or away from your hobby or work area.
 - Prevent transfer of lead dust to your vehicle, and if possible avoid having baby/child car seats, prams and toys etc. in the vehicle you take to work or your hobby. Change into clean clothes and shoes before getting in your car.
- > **Clean** your hobby area regularly:
 - Wet wipe or mop hobby area using sugar soap. Do not dry dust or sweep.
 - Use vacuum cleaners with high efficiency particulate air (HEPA) filters.
 - Do not use the same cleaning cloths in your hobby area that you use to clean other areas of your house.

If your occupation involves working with leadlight or stained glass, you and your employer must comply with work health and safety legislation for lead risk work. Contact [Safework SA](#) for information about laws and your legal responsibilities.

What should you do if you think you have been exposed to lead?

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

More information

> SA Health

- Lead
www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/lead
- Danger of take-home lead from workplaces and hobbies
www.bit.ly/3IUHgwP
- Lead in everyday household items
www.bit.ly/3zhZRQI

> SafeWork SA

- Lead risk work
www.safework.sa.gov.au/workplaces/work-tasks-and-projects/lead-risk-work

> Department of Agriculture, Water and Environment

- Lead in stained glass
www.awe.gov.au/environment/protection/chemicals-management/lead/lead-in-stained-glass

For more information

**Scientific Services Branch
Health Protection and Licensing Services
PO Box 6, Rundle Mall
Adelaide SA 5000
Telephone: 08 8226 7100
www.sahealth.sa.gov.au**

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