

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, drinks, cooking or bathing children.
- Damp wipe surfaces and mop floors around the home regularly. Wash children's toys often and store in sealed containers.
- 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.
- Many trades, not just mining and smelting industries, have a level of lead risk. It is likely that lead-contaminated dust from workplaces can be brought into your home and car on your clothes, hair, skin, and other work items including keys and mobile phones. Workers should shower and change as soon as possible after work to reduce transfer of lead to family members. This transfer is called take-home lead.

For more information

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

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Information about lead for Port Pirie families

Environmental Health Centre



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What is lead?

In Port Pirie, lead is present in our environment due to over a century of smelting activities.

Lead is a heavy metal that has been used extensively by many industries in the past but as our knowledge of its toxic health effects expanded, the use of lead has been regulated and reduced.

Lead is still used in leadlight, vehicle batteries, pottery glazes, ammunition and in some paints. In Port Pirie, you can assume all dust and soil will have some level of lead.

How does lead get into your body?

In Port Pirie, lead contaminated house dust is the major source of exposure to young children due to their normal developmental behaviours.

Majority of the lead that gets into your body is ingested (swallowed). Good hand washing, with soap and water, and hand drying is the best way to keep lead out of your body, and in Port Pirie it is best to avoid drinking rainwater, consuming home-grown produce (including eggs) and local, recreationally caught seafood.

This is particularly important for pregnant women, women planning a pregnancy, babies and young children.

What happens when lead gets into your body?

Lead is not required by the body for any purpose. Even in small amounts, lead can be harmful to the body and affect the brain and nervous system.

How does lead get out of your body?

Lead cannot leave the body by breath or sweat. Some lead is passed through faeces, although most lead is passed out in the urine. Lead 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 $5 \mu\text{g}/\text{dL}$ the source of exposure should be investigated further, particularly if the person is a child or a woman who is pregnant or planning a pregnancy.

Who should be tested?

- Babies and pre-school children should have regular tests as they are at increased risk of elevated blood lead levels, particularly if they are living or regularly spend time in Port Pirie (i.e. child care/grandparents' home).
- 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.

The Environmental Health Centre provides services free of charge.

SA Pathology

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