

# Lead Poisoning and Pregnancy: Are You and Your Baby at Risk?

## What is Lead Poisoning?

Lead in the body can cause permanent damage to the brain and other organs. Children are most at risk for the damage caused by lead poisoning. But, a pregnant woman who has lead in her body may expose her baby by passing the lead to the fetus.

## Lead can be found in:

- ◆ Household Paint
- ◆ Food
- ◆ Water
- ◆ Soil

Other sources include some hobbies, occupations, ethnic folk remedies, and ethnic cosmetics. These can expose people to lead.



## Lead Poisoning and Pregnancy:

Babies exposed to lead before they are born may have behavioral and learning difficulties. They may not develop to their full intelligence potential and have problems learning throughout their lives. If a woman is pregnant and becomes exposed to lead, she may increase her risk of:



- ◆ **Premature Birth** - Premature babies have a higher risk of illness and death.
- ◆ **Miscarriage or Stillbirth** - High levels of lead can cause babies to die before birth.
- ◆ **Low Birth Weight** - Babies do not grow inside the mother's womb at a normal rate. At birth, these babies have a higher risk of illness and death.

## How is an Unborn Baby Exposed to Lead?



- ◆ A pregnant woman can breathe in or swallow lead. This passes from her to the fetus.
- ◆ The lead can enter the mother's bloodstream.
- ◆ Lead in the mother's womb passes through the placenta and can get into the baby's bones, brain, and other organs.

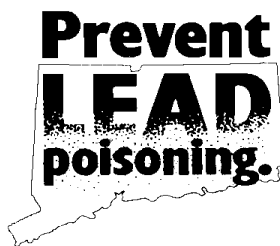
If a pregnant woman was exposed to lead in the past, before becoming pregnant, this can also cause problems for the unborn baby. This lead can be stored in her bones for many years and then be released during pregnancy.

## What Can a Pregnant Woman Do to Protect her Unborn Baby?

- ◆ Talk to her physician to obtain more information about lead poisoning.
- ◆ Consider being tested to measure lead levels in the blood.
- ◆ Stay away from work areas where products such as paint that contain lead are being removed.
- ◆ Contact the local or state health department for advice about lead paint testing and lead paint removal.

## Healthy Habits to Follow During Pregnancy:

- ◆ Eat a healthy balanced diet, especially foods high in iron, calcium, and folic acid. This may reduce the amount of lead absorbed by the body.
- ◆ Exercise regularly; with a healthy care provider's approval.
- ◆ Avoid substances that may contain lead, including tobacco and other drugs.



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