

Lead, lead paint and lead dust

Reason	Anyone working with lead or materials containing lead must understand the dangers. Lead is a cumulative poison and so exposure must be controlled. In extreme cases it can kill. Workers, building occupants and their families can be at risk.
Outline	This talk covers the effects of lead on the body, the sources of exposure and how to control exposure.



Lined area for notes or additional information.



After working with lead, wash contaminated skin before eating or drinking. Good personal hygiene is essential.



Why is it important to control exposure to lead?

Who has responsibility for your health and safety?

What work do you do that may expose you to lead?

What is the most likely route of lead entry into the body resulting from your work?

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The effects of lead

1. Lead has long been known to be a poison (toxic).
2. Exposure can cause anaemia, headaches, tiredness, irritability and nausea. More serious effects are damage to the kidneys, nervous system and brain.
3. Ingesting lead may cause impotence and male infertility and cause problems in pregnancy for women. Women of childbearing age and young people must be particularly protected from exposure.
4. Smoking increases the risk of lead-related health problems.

Sources of lead exposure

1. Most risks are from dust, fumes or vapour, from when lead is heated, cut, damaged or otherwise disturbed.
2. As a result of hot works (such as torch-cutting, burning or welding).
3. Through repair, refurbishment, decoration and demolition work involving old lead or lead-painted structures or features. There is an increased risk within pre-1970 buildings.
4. From dry-sanding (for example, windows and doors in private homes). Building occupiers can be at risk if clean-up is not thorough.
5. Cutting lead or lead-painted materials with disc-cutters.
6. Burning off old lead-based paints (which should be avoided).
7. Spray painting with lead-based paints.
8. Lead-painted asbestos-containing materials – double hazard.
9. Disturbance of leaded exhaust particles in roof insulation.
10. Heating lead during plumbing and soldering and work involving handling or cleaning sheet lead are regarded as lower risk activities, but still may require control measures to be put in place.

Control of lead exposure

1. Employers must prevent or control lead exposure for anyone likely to be directly or indirectly affected.
2. Your employer must inform you of health risks and advise lead-safe working practices, such as working 'wet', high-efficiency particulate air (HEPA) vacuuming and using local exhaust ventilation (LEV) that has been provided.
3. Any lead dust must be thoroughly cleaned up and lead fumes controlled.
4. The routes of entry into the body are inhalation (through the nose) and ingestion (through the mouth).
5. Don't take lead dust home on your clothes, as this can cause a risk to your family.
6. You may have to wear respiratory protective equipment (RPE) (minimum FFP3 or P3) to protect against lead dust, depending on air-sampling results.
7. After working with lead, wash contaminated skin before eating or drinking. Good personal hygiene is essential.
8. Never eat, drink or smoke in areas where work with lead has been carried out.
9. If you are at significant risk of exposure, your employer should put processes in place to monitor your blood-lead levels to determine your level of exposure and then to take appropriate actions.