

1 Real Estate Advisor

The risk of Lead Paint

As recently as 1977, lead-based paint was used in homes across the United States which is why lead poisoning remains a major environmental health problem for Americans. If you are currently living in a home built before 1978, it's quite possible that you could have lead paint somewhere in your home. That does not mean that your house is unsafe. It just means that you have to take certain precautions to ensure your health and the health of your family members.

Lead poisoning is a concern for everyone, but children under six years old carry the greatest risk. Not only are children more likely to expose themselves to lead dust, the consequences of lead poisoning in the early developmental stages of life can do serious harm to a child's brain and nervous system. Additionally children can suffer from, impaired growth, behavior and learning disorders, hearing impairment and headaches.

In adults, lead poisoning can lead to reproductive problems, pregnancy difficulties, memory impairment, digestive disorders, high blood pressure, nervous system disorders and muscle and joint pain.

How are you exposed?

Lead must enter into the body either by consuming it or by inhaling lead dust. The most common ways that people expose themselves are:

- Putting their hands or other objects covered with lead dust in their mouths
- Eating paint chips or soil that contains lead
- Breathing in lead dust, especially during renovations that disturb painted surfaces

So, if you do have lead-based paint in your home, how do you protect yourself?

By taking sensible steps to make sure that the painted surfaces in your home are in good condition and taking care of worn out areas when they arise. Remember – lead-based paint that is in good condition is not a hazard. Peeling, chipping, chalking or cracking lead-based paint is a problem and needs immediate attention.

Testing for lead in the home

A thorough inspection of your home for lead-based paint will include both a paint inspection and a risk assessment. The paint inspection will tell you the lead content of all the painted surfaces in your home. A risk assessment will tell you about the condition of the paint and which areas are of concern for exposure. It will also tell you what steps you can take to safely remove the lead-based paint and dust from your home.

While there are do-it-yourself lead paint testing kits available at your local hardware store, it's a good idea to hire a certified professional to perform an XRF (x-ray fluorescence) test for you. Tools available for you in the hardware store only test the top layer of paint so you won't get information on layers that are beneath the surface where lead based paint is most likely found. The XRF test is also non-destructive.

You can contact the National Lead Information Center (NLIC) at 1-800-424-LEAD or visit www.epa.gov to find more information about lead paint and certified contractors in your area.

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