

News Release

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For Immediate Release

Contact: Diana Garcia, Program Manager, 308-345-4223

Lead Poisoning: Understanding the Causes, Effects, and Prevention

Southwest Nebraska Public Health Department (SWNPHD) is working to educate residents of the health district on the dangers of lead exposure and lead poisoning. Lead poisoning is a serious and preventable health condition that continues to affect millions of people worldwide, particularly in young children and vulnerable populations. Despite efforts to reduce exposure, lead remains a threat in older homes, certain occupations, and in environmental sources.

What is Lead Poisoning?

Lead poisoning occurs when lead builds up in the body, typically over a period of months or years. Lead is a toxic metal that can be found in many places, such as old paint, plumbing, soil, and even imported goods. It is especially dangerous for children under the age of six, as their developing brains and nervous systems are highly susceptible to damage from lead exposure.

Causes of Lead Poisoning

Lead poisoning is caused by prolonged exposure to lead. Common sources include:

- **Lead-based Paint:** Homes and buildings constructed before 1978 often contain lead-based paint. When this paint deteriorates or is disturbed during renovations, lead dust can be inhaled or ingested.
- **Soil Contamination:** Areas near older homes, industrial sites, or highways may have lead in the soil. Children who play outside can be exposed to contaminated soil.
- **Plumbing:** Lead pipes and plumbing fixtures can leach lead into drinking water, especially when water has been sitting in pipes for extended periods.
- **Imported Goods and Cosmetics:** Lead can be found in certain imported toys, jewelry, spices, and cosmetics, posing a risk to individuals using these products.
- **Occupational Exposure:** Workers in industries such as construction, painting, or manufacturing may come into contact with lead and bring it home on clothing or equipment.

Effects of Lead Poisoning

Lead poisoning can have severe and long-lasting health consequences. There is no safe level of lead. Even low levels of lead exposure can be harmful, especially in children. The effects include:

- **Cognitive Impairment:** Lead exposure can cause learning disabilities, reduced IQ, and attention problems in children.
- **Behavioral Issues:** Children exposed to lead may develop behavioral problems, such as aggression, hyperactivity, and difficulty in school.
- **Physical Health Effects:** Lead poisoning can cause headaches, fatigue, joint pain, and abdominal discomfort. In severe cases, it may lead to seizures, coma, or death.
- **Harm to Pregnant Women:** Lead exposure during pregnancy can result in premature birth, low birth weight, or developmental delays in the baby.
- **Organ Damage:** Chronic lead poisoning can damage the kidneys, liver, and nervous system, even in adults.

Lead Poisoning Prevention

"Preventing lead poisoning is key to reducing the risk of these harmful health effects," states Diana Garcia, Program Manager at SWNPHD.

Here are practical steps to protect yourself and your family:

- **Test for Lead:** If you live in a home built before 1978, have your home tested for lead-based paint and dust. If you are concerned about lead in drinking water, have your water tested for lead contamination.
- **Clean Regularly:** Keep your home free of dust, especially in areas with peeling paint. The best method to contain lead dust is to wet wash surfaces such as windowsills, doors, walls and floors. Regularly wash hands, toys, and pacifiers for young children to avoid ingesting lead dust.
- **Runs Your Water:** Let your tap water run for several minutes before using it for drinking or cooking and stick with cold water.
- **Use Filters:** Use water filters certified to remove lead.
- **Renovate Safely:** If renovating an older home, hire a certified lead-safe contractor who can follow proper safety procedures to prevent lead dust exposure.
- **Check Imported Goods:** Be cautious with imported toys, jewelry, and cosmetics, especially those purchased from online sources. Ensure they meet safety standards.

What to Do if You Suspect Lead Poisoning

If you suspect that you or your child may have been exposed to lead, seek medical advice immediately. A blood test can determine lead levels in the body. Early detection and intervention are crucial to prevent further damage. For children, a healthcare provider can offer guidance on managing lead poisoning and reducing exposure.

"Lead poisoning is preventable, and public awareness is essential in eliminating this silent danger," continues Garcia. "By understanding the sources, effects, and preventative measures, we can work together to protect future generations from lead exposure and its harmful consequences."

For more information contact SWNPHD at 308-345-4223. Southwest Nebraska Public Health Department serves Chase, Dundy, Frontier, Furnas, Hayes, Hitchcock, Keith, Perkins, and Red Willow counties. The website swhealth.ne.gov contains many resources and additional information helpful to prevent disease, promote and protect health. Follow us on Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube.

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