

CENTRAL CONNECTICUT HEALTH DISTRICT

SERVING THE TOWNS OF BERLIN, ROCKY HILL AND WETHERSFIELD

Central Office:
505 Silas Deane Highway
Wethersfield, CT 06109
Phone (860) 721-2822 Fax (860) 721-2823

Berlin Office:
240 Kensington Road
Berlin, CT 06037
Phone (860) 828-7017 Fax (860) 828-9248
www.ccthd.org

Rocky Hill Office:
761 Old Main Street
Rocky Hill, CT 06067
Phone (860) 258-2770 Fax: (860) 258-2767

July 18, 2005

Lead Poisoning Can Have Serious Consequences

Beginning in the spring and continuing into the fall, warm weather provides the incentive to tackle household repairs and renovations. Since our region of the country was settled first, much of our housing stock is old, if not historic. While older housing often features a certain amount of charm, it also affords special concerns relating to age. One of these concerns is the use of lead paint.

According to the Federal Department of Housing, about 25% of the housing stock in America (about 24 million homes) contains “significant lead-based paint hazards.” These hazards include surfaces with deteriorating, flaking, lead paint, and the resulting lead contaminated dust. Lead, a highly toxic metal, can enter the body by eating it or breathing it. Once inside the body, lead can cause serious health problems.

Both adults and children can suffer from lead poisoning. Generally speaking, as the concentration of lead in the body increases, the likelihood of one developing health problems also increases. Most adults with lead poisoning are exposed in their work environment or while remodeling their home. Some hobbies, such as making stained glass or refinishing furniture, also offer opportunities for lead exposure. Adults with lead poisoning may experience high blood pressure, digestive problems, nerve disorders, memory and concentration problems, muscle and joint pain, cataracts, and fertility problems, especially in men. Women who are pregnant when exposed to lead can pass the lead to their unborn fetus.

According to the Centers for Disease Control, about 4 million houses containing lead-based paint are home to 1 or more young children. Children are especially susceptible to the adverse health effects associated with lead poisoning, because the lead can gradually accumulate in their nervous system as their bodies develop. As many as 400,000 children in this country 5 years old and younger have lead levels in their bodies in high enough concentrations to cause concern, according to the Mayo Clinic. Unfortunately, the signs and symptoms in children are non-specific, so children may be exposed for prolonged periods of time before anyone discovers they have lead poisoning. They may show no symptoms at all, or may become irritable, lose their appetite, become sluggish, lose weight, become pale as a result of anemia, or experience abdominal pain, constipation, or vomiting. Lead poisoning can cause damage to the nervous system and kidneys, learning disabilities, hearing damage, poor muscle coordination, decreased muscle and bone growth, and problems with speech, language, and behavior. High levels of lead can lead to seizures, unconsciousness, and even death. Children can get lead poisoning by eating lead paint chips that peel off surfaces in and around the home, chewing on window sills and door frames, and putting their hands or toys that have lead dust on them in their mouths, as well as breathing in lead dust when renovations are under way.

To determine if a person has lead poisoning, a simple blood test is administered. The CDC recommends that children should be tested at 6 months of age, and once each year thereafter if the risk for exposure is high. Once lead has been detected in the body, it is imperative that its source be determined so that exposure can be halted. In severe cases, medication that binds to the lead so it can be excreted from the

body is necessary.

The risk of lead poisoning can be reduced by following certain safety practices. In the case of small children, caregivers should wash the child's hands after they play outside, before eating, and before going to bed. Children should not be allowed to play near major roads and bridges. Providing nutritious, low-fat meals that are high in iron and calcium is important, because these minerals help to prevent the absorption of lead. Dusty surfaces should be cleaned with a wet mop and a damp cloth, and children's toys, bottles, and pacifiers should be washed often.

Safety measures that can protect adults from lead poisoning include

- wearing protective clothing and equipment when renovating the home;
- refraining from sanding lead paint or using an open flame torch when attempting to remove it from surfaces;
- eating and drinking in areas that are free of lead dust.

If you suspect your home may contain lead-based paint, a lead-inspector can be hired to test all the paint. To determine if your house has any lead-contaminated dust, a risk assessor or sampling technician may be employed to take samples and submit them to a laboratory for analysis. In addition, the National Safety Council offers a lead dust test kit for consumers to test their own homes. Interested parties can contact the NSC by calling 800-621-7619 or by visiting their web site for a downloadable order form at www.nsc.org.

Additional information about lead poisoning is available at the following sites: the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences, www.niehs.nih.gov, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (800-532-3394), www.epa.gov, the Mayo Clinic, www.mayoclinic.com, and the Consumer Product Safety Commission (212-620-4120), www.cpsc.gov. To obtain further information about this or other public health concerns, contact the Central Connecticut Health District at 860 721-2822 (www.ccthd.org).