

LEAD FAQ's

Why should I be concerned about lead?

Although lead contamination can come from many sources, the major source of lead poisoning today is lead-based paint. Lead-based paint has been banned for years, but it is still found on the walls in older homes, and it is present on Fort Jackson. Many of our housing units and older buildings on the installation were built before lead in paint was regulated in 1978. Somewhere under those many layers may be lead-based paint.

What are the hazards from lead-based paint?

The danger from lead-based paint depends upon the amount of lead in the paint and the condition of the paint. Lead-based paint in good condition is not a hazard. If the paint is under several newer layers of paint, it is safely covered and there is little danger of contamination. However, chipped or peeling paint is a different matter. Paint chips can break down into a fine dust, which settles on floors, furniture and toys. Dust is re-circulated by sweeping, vacuuming or even just walking. Lead can also be found in the soil around buildings with exterior lead-based paint.

What are the health hazards?

Although lead can be harmful to adults, it is especially toxic to children under six. This is because of smaller body size and because children in this age group, especially infants and toddlers, are more likely to put their hands or other objects, which may be contaminated with lead dust, into their mouths. Since the fetus is at risk from high blood lead levels in the mother, pregnant women and women of childbearing age should also be aware of the hazards of high blood lead levels. Elevated blood lead levels in children can cause reading and learning disabilities, behavior problems, developmental deficiencies, or hearing problems. Very high levels of lead can cause permanent kidney or brain damage and may even result in death.

What are the symptoms of lead poisoning?

Symptoms of lead poisoning, if there are any at all, are easily confused with other illnesses. Symptoms may include tiredness, mood changes, headaches, loss of appetite, stomachaches, and insomnia.

What is the Army's lead-based paint management policy?

The Army's policy is to concentrate on facilities where small children are likely to be present for extended periods of time, such as family housing. The policy is to manage lead-based paint in place by painting over it until such time that removal is more cost effective than in-place management; when in-place management is not working or during a major renovation project. We are renovating many of our quarters and this project includes abatement of lead-based paint. We will continue to abate lead paint in non-renovated quarters as the need arises. However, this is a long-term project; proper abatement or encapsulation is time-consuming and costly.

What can I do to protect my family and reduce the risk?

Find out about lead and ways to reduce its hazards early, instead of waiting for signs and symptoms to develop (remember there may be none). The Community Health Nurse, 751-5251, can answer your questions about lead and your family.

- Keep small children away from areas where paint is chipping and peeling.
- Don't vacuum, dust or dry sweep paint chips. Mist them first with water, then slowly sweep up and mop or wipe the area.
- If you have chipped or peeling paint, clean floors, baseboards, window wells and sills on a weekly basis. Use a high-phosphate (5-8%) cleaning solution, such as some dishwashing detergents or tri-sodium phosphate (TSP).
- Don't use the same sponges or cloths used to clean other areas. Use disposable rags or towels and wear gloves to protect your skin.
- Don't walk on chipped paint.
- Clean when children are sleeping or not at home (at least not in the room)
- Put a small amount of cornstarch on the floor and vacuum over it when you first change the bag in your vacuum cleaner. The cornstarch will coat the inside of the bag and trap small dust particles. Many vacuums on the market now have HEPA filters, which capture dust more efficiently.
- Eat a healthy diet. Foods high in iron, protein, vitamin C, and calcium, and low in fats and oil reduce the absorption of lead into the body. Feed children several times a day - children absorb more lead on an empty stomach.
- Don't track lead into your home. Take off your shoes at the door, especially if you've been in a high-lead area, such as a rifle range or in soil with high lead content.
- Keep children from playing in the dirt under the eaves or close to porches on old houses. Mulching or covering these areas can greatly reduce the risk.
- Try not to open or close the windows often. Take a moment to wipe the sills down with a wet disposable towel after opening. Cover window wells with aluminum foil if they are in poor condition.

- Don't try to scrape or repair the paint yourself. If not done properly, it'll only make things worse.
- Wash children's hands and faces before each meal, snack and bedtime. Wash your hands before preparing meals.
- Wash toys and pacifiers on a regular basis, especially after they've been on the floor.
- Don't eat foods that fall on the floor.
- Block damaged paint areas with furniture.
- Be wary of pewter, crystal and pottery, especially brightly colored, handmade or imported ceramic ware. Don't use it for food or drinks.
- Keep your hobbies safe. If you refinish furniture, make stained glass objects, load your own ammunition or have another lead-related hobby, follow safety guidelines on the packages. Keep children away from the area and wash your hobby clothes separately from the rest of the wash.