pediatric associates
of austin, p.a.

Blood lead testing

What Is Lead — and How Can It Get Into the Body?

- **Lead (Pb)** is a heavy metal. It was once used widely in paint, plumbing, gasoline, and many consumer products.
- Lead can get into the body when children **inhale lead dust**, or **swallow lead-contaminated dust, soil, paint chips, or water**. Items such as old paint, old plumbing (pipes or solder), contaminated soil, or dust in older homes (especially pre-1978) commonly pose risk.
- Once lead enters the blood, it can travel throughout the body and accumulate — especially in bones — and can damage the nervous system, even at low levels.
- Small amounts can be harmful, and children typically look healthy — with **no obvious symptoms**. Because of this, we screen for lead at certain recommended intervals.

When and How Do We Check for Lead?

- At well-child visits, your child's provider will review any risks for lead in the environment.
- We routinely check lead levels at the **9 month and 2 years well check visits.**
- The test is be done via a **capillary sample** (finger-stick). In the vast majority, the screen is normal and no additional follow-up is needed. If results were elevated or borderline, we would discuss further and likely recommend repeating the test with a **venous blood draw**.

Why Could Blood Lead Levels Be High?

Children can be exposed through a variety of common but often hidden sources. Examples include:

- **Old lead-based paint or dust** in walls, windowsills, baseboards — especially in homes built before 1978.
- **Contaminated soil** — perhaps from past use of leaded gasoline, industrial emissions, or peeling exterior paint on older houses.
- **Lead in plumbing or water** if the household has old pipes or lead solder.
- **Dust or objects** (toys, jewelry, pottery, certain imported goods) that include lead or are painted/coated with lead — especially items from countries where lead regulation is less strict.
- Activities that disturb old paint (e.g., renovation, sanding) — which can release lead dust.

What to Do If a Blood Lead Test Is High

1. Don't worry. We will confirm whether the level is actually high using a venous blood draw**.**
2. If confirmed, **high lead levels are treatable**. We will help involve the right specialists who can offer treatment and help identify and remove sources of exposure.
3. Take steps to eliminate or reduce lead exposure in the home. This includes testing and abatement of lead paint/dust, checking water/plumbing, testing soil, and ensuring children avoid areas with peeling paint or dust.
4. Monitor and follow up with repeat blood lead testing. Your child's provider will recommend follow-up testing at intervals based on blood lead level and will discuss treatment, if indicated.

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References: American Academy of Pediatrics, Healthy Children.org