



**Protect Yourself**

**Lead Poisoning  
on the Job**

# Why is lead a concern?

## At Work

Lead poisoning can occur on the job by breathing in or swallowing lead dust and fumes. Lead can get in your mouth from contaminated hands while eating, drinking, or smoking, and from contact with lead dust on clothing and surfaces.

Lead is highly toxic and stays in the body for years. It can damage the brain, nervous system, kidneys, and reproductive system. It can also cause other health problems.

Most adults with lead poisoning don't feel sick. Lead poisoning symptoms can be confused with common symptoms like tiredness, headaches, or diarrhea.

Early Symptoms	Later Symptoms
Tiredness	Male problems (low sperm and sex drive)
Headache	Fatigue
Poor appetite	Muscle and joint pain
Sleeplessness	Memory problems
Metallic taste	Gastrointestinal issues (diarrhea, nausea, and vomiting)

## At Home

You can take lead home from work because dust from the workplace can collect on your hair, clothes, shoes, and body. Bringing lead into the home can harm your family. Children and people who are pregnant are at highest risk of lead poisoning.



## What are high-risk jobs?

You could be exposed to lead if you:

- Grind, cut, drill, sand, scrape, or blast surfaces that are coated with lead paint.
- Tear down structures that have been painted with lead-based paint.
- Remodel and repair structures with lead paint, pipes, and fittings.
- Cut through cables that contain lead.
- Pour powders containing lead pigment.
- Use heat guns to remove paint from doors, windows, and other surfaces.
- Weld or solder lead-containing materials, such as electronics, stained glass, or radiators.
- Torch cut-coated and uncoated metal.
- Shoot leaded bullets in an indoor firing range.
- Make your own bullets or fishing sinkers.
- Make stained glass or pottery.
- Handle storage batteries, work on radiators, paint car parts, or use lubricants.



# What must your employer do?



- Perform a lead hazard assessment.
- Notify you of all lead hazards at work.
- Provide you with personal protective equipment, including work shoes and personal respiratory equipment (if needed).
- Provide all required Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) training and have a written Respiratory Protection Program (if needed) in your preferred language.
- Provide break and wash areas that are away from work areas, and regularly cleaned.

All employers must comply with all OSHA requirements. Learn more at [www.osha.gov/lead/enforcement](http://www.osha.gov/lead/enforcement).

## How to know if you're at risk?

A blood lead test is the only way to know if you or your family may have been exposed to unsafe levels of lead.

# What should you do?

- Change into your work clothes and shoes before beginning work, and store your personal items away from work areas.
- Follow all personal protective equipment requirements provided by your employer to ensure you are using them correctly.
  - Complete all the medical clearance and respirator fit test requirements.
  - Follow procedures to inspect, care, maintain, use, and store all personal protective equipment.
- Wash your hands and face before eating, drinking, or smoking and do this away from work areas.
- Clean up dust and debris in work areas and in vehicles on a regular schedule using special high efficiency particulate air filter (HEPA filter) vacuums and/or wet methods. Don't use dry methods like sweeping and brushing.
- If you can, shower at the end of the day before you go home, or wash your hands, arms, and face before you change into your street clothes and shoes.
- Wash your clothes at work, if possible, or bag them and wash and dry them separately from other household laundry.





## Know your rights.

You have the right to a safe workplace. You have the right to ask for an inspection.

- If you are a **private sector employee**, and think that your employer may not be protecting you from a safety or health hazard, contact your closest OSHA office at [www.OSHA.gov/contactus/bystate/NY/areaoffice](http://www.OSHA.gov/contactus/bystate/NY/areaoffice) or call (800) 321-6742.
- If you are a **public sector employee** at a local, county, or state government office, find your closest Public Employee Safety and Health (PESH) office at [www.dol.ny.gov/public-employee-safety-health](http://www.dol.ny.gov/public-employee-safety-health) or call (518) 457-9000.

# Who can help?

**Your Employer.** Your employer is responsible for protecting you from lead on the job. Ask about your workplace safety requirements, such as hazard assessments, cleaning procedures, personal protective equipment, and engineering controls like ventilation systems.

**Your Union.** Talk to your union representative about health and safety concerns. They can help advocate for you.

**Your Health Care Providers.** It is important for your health care providers to know about possible lead exposure even if you don't have symptoms. They can provide you with a blood test for lead, treatment, and advice about lead exposure to reduce your risk.

## **New York State Department of Health** [health.ny.gov/adultlead](https://health.ny.gov/adultlead)

The Bureau of Occupational Health and Injury Prevention industrial hygienists can help you understand the risks of lead on the job and other job-related health concerns such as:

- Worker protection programs.
- Technical assistance in controlling workplace hazards.
- Use of personal and respiratory protective equipment.

These services are free of charge. Call (518) 402-7900 or email [boh@health.ny.gov](mailto:boh@health.ny.gov).

## **Occupational Health Clinic Network** [health.ny.gov/ohcn](https://health.ny.gov/ohcn)

Talk with occupational health experts about getting a blood lead test, preventing exposures/injuries at work, respirator fit testing, medical clearance, health examinations, and wellness programs.