

Safe Gardening: Away from Lead Contaminated Soil

Although lead-based paint is the most likely source of lead in a home, lead can also be found in other places. One of these places is in the soil (dirt). Lead contaminated soil can be a health hazard to children who play in the soil, gardeners who work with the soil, and those who eat food/herbs grown in contaminated soil.

Lead is released into the environment through factory pollution and past leaded gasoline emissions. Lead can also get into soil from chips of old, peeling, lead-based paint on the outside of a home and lead dust from home remodeling/demolition projects.

Health Effects

Lead poisoning can occur at any age. Children under the age of 6 are at higher risk of lead poisoning because their bodies absorb the lead more easily and the lead can build up to higher levels. Children with high lead levels in their blood may not have any symptoms, but the longterm effects can be quite problematic. Lead poisoning can cause learning disabilities, decreased growth, hyperactivity and impaired hearing, as well as damage to other vital organs within the body, such as the kidneys and stomach.

Important Tips for Safer Gardening and Home Grown Produce

Plants usually do not absorb lead, but in areas with a high concentration of lead, plants may take in a small amount. Most fruits and vegetables have not been shown to absorb lead. Lead is more likely to be found in leafy vegetables such as lettuce and cabbage and root crops like carrots and potatoes.

- After gardening, always wash hands and face as well as any produce/herbs grown in the garden.
- If possible, plant gardens away from roads and old buildings
- Plant gardens in pots or raised beds using new soil and compost.

Testing the Soil for Lead

Testing your soil is the only way to determine if your soil is contaminated with unhealthy levels of lead. The process is inexpensive and easy. A current list of the National Lead Laboratory Accreditation Program's (NLLAP) recognized laboratories can be obtained by calling the National Lead Information Center at 1-800-424-LEAD or check out the list at <http://www.epa.gov/lead/pubs/nllaplist.pdf>.

For More Information on Lead, Lead Testing, and Lead Programs:

Call the Peoria City/County Health Department, Environmental Health Division at 309-679-6161 or visit our website at www.pcchd.org.



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